

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Thursday, September 21, 2006

Committee Room 1

Organizational/Agenda Setting Meeting

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VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Stephen McNeil (Chair)
Keith Bain
Pat Dunn
Chuck Porter
Gordon Gosse
David Wilson (Sackville-Cobequid)
Percy Paris
Harold Theriault
Wayne Gaudet

[Chuck Porter was replaced by Alfie MacLeod.]

In Attendance:

Darlene Henry
Legislative Committee Clerk



HALIFAX, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2006

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIR

Stephen McNeil

THE CHAIR: If I could have everybody take their seats and we'll move forward.

I want to welcome everybody this morning to our organizational meeting of the Committee on Veterans Affairs. Before we get started, perhaps we'll have members introduce themselves, starting with Mr. Wilson.

[The committee members introduced themselves]

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. If everyone co-operates with me, we can be out of here pretty quickly. So that's all up to you guys. (Laughter) If you guys are all as co-operative as I am, we should be out of here early.

The first business we should deal with today is electing a vice-chairman and I'm looking for nominations for the position of vice-chairman.

KEITH BAIN: Mr. Chairman, I nominate Chuck Porter as vice-chairman.

THE CHAIR: Are there any further nominations?

I guess Mr. Porter becomes the vice-chairman of this committee. You could let him know. Tell him that he has to start showing up, okay? (Laughter)

All of you have in front of you a list of requests that have been put towards the committee. I don't know whether any of the caucuses have brought with them any suggestions or any organizations that they want to bring.

ALFIE MACLEOD: We'd like to invite Mr. Wilfred Edmond. He has recently been elected Vice-Chairman of District Command for the Royal Canadian Legion. I believe he's

the first Nova Scotian since the early 1950s who has been elected to that position and he is the first Cape Bretoner who has ever been elected to a position in that. He has been an active worker for the Legion for the last 30 years and very involved in many different aspects of the Legion.

THE CHAIR: One of the things that I should have mentioned, just prior to the election, we had coming in before us Veterans Affairs Canada talking about the new Veterans Charter. They were slated to come in on May 18th, and of course the election was called and we haven't done that. I'm wondering whether or not, from the member for Cape Breton West, it's time-sensitive that your request around Wilfred Edmond come in.

ALFIE MACLEOD: It would probably, in my opinion, be better to hear from Veterans Affairs Canada first, to see what it is and then maybe ask him for the Legion's response to that.

THE CHAIR: So is everyone agreed that perhaps the meeting that we had set for May 18th with Veterans Affairs Canada around the new charter be our first order of business?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Great, great.

THE CHAIR: Also in front of you you'll have a couple of other pieces of correspondence. One is from the Canadian Youth Remembrance Society. They have previously presented before this committee. They're asking to come in again, to do an update. I'm looking for some feedback.

You guys are agreeable, I'm telling you right now. What's going on here? This is a minority government at its best.

Also, the member for Clare had written the previous chairman regarding the Merchant Navy veterans. All of you have that letter in front of you. Maybe you could just take a minute to review it, and maybe the member for Clare would . . .

WAYNE GAUDET: Mr. Chairman, I met with a merchant navy veteran from home. He basically was telling me that they've never been recognized by the Government of Canada - presented with a medal, I guess I should start off with. I thought his suggestion was kind of interesting. I forwarded a letter to the former chairman of the Veterans Affairs Committee to maybe invite someone from the merchant navy to come in and further debate this item that he brought forward.

I would suggest that, if at all possible, we invite someone from the merchant navy to come in, and maybe to explore this possibility of maybe forwarding a letter to the Government of Canada on behalf of the former merchant navy veterans of Nova Scotia, requesting that the Government of Canada consider presenting them with a medal of honour.

THE CHAIR: Is there any further discussion?

Is everyone in agreement that we invite . . .

Agreed.

HAROLD THERIAULT: Do we know why they were not recognized? Maybe we could find that out.

THE CHAIR: That may be part of their presentation when they come in.

PERCY PARIS: Is there an association of the merchant navy?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Yes, there is.

KEITH BAIN: I know that throughout the summer they've had numerous recognition functions. There was one in Cape Breton a couple of weeks ago. It was basically just to recognize the contribution of the merchant navy, but you're right, there were no medals or anything. It seems like they've been pushed to one side, as far as their service goes. I think it's a great idea.

THE CHAIR: If it is the wish of the committee, we will make contact with the organization and invite them in to do a presentation. I want to recognize the member for Pictou Centre who has come in, and welcome him to the committee.

PAT DUNN: Thank you. I was just in a meeting with the Premier, that's why I'm a couple of minutes late.

THE CHAIR: Does anyone have any other . . .

The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

DAVID WILSON: I just want to emphasize, to get in and extend the invitation to Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command of the Royal Canadian Legion. They seem to always be in to prep us on what they're going to do throughout the year. I think it might be wise to maybe see some of these groups first, and then we can always send correspondence to them to see what their feelings are. I know this committee really emphasizes and promotes the Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command requests. So it might be interesting to see how they take to some of these presentations, and to get them in over the next couple of months.

THE CHAIR: The member for Cape Breton Nova.

GORDON GOSSE: I just realized, too, with David's comments, that this is the 80th Anniversary of the Royal Canadian Legion this year, 2006. Maybe it's possible that we could see if there's anything planned for the remainder of the year, being as it's the 80th Anniversary of the Royal Canadian Legion.

THE CHAIR: If it's the wish of the committee . . .

The member for Cape Breton West.

ALFIE MACLEOD: Mr. Chairman, not being on this committee prior to the election, I'm just not sure, where this is the Year of the War Bride, if there is anything that can be done by this committee to recognize the war brides around the province. I don't know if there's anything that the committee itself can do. I know there have been a number of functions held privately, but is there something that the committee can do to recognize the Year of the War Bride?

THE CHAIR: We could attempt to. I know on November 8th, I believe it is, the war brides from across Canada will be arriving at Pier 21, and on November 10th, I believe it is, they're leaving here and heading to Ottawa for Remembrance Day, to be celebrated in Ottawa.

[9:15 a.m.]

During that function, there are a number of events that are going on that perhaps we could coordinate with the Speaker to find out whether or not there's a role for us to play as a committee or as a province to help support that event. I'm not sure whether you were thinking of something separate from that.

ALFIE MACLEOD: I just think that there is a role to be played here to recognize those individuals, and I think we actually have several members of the House whose mothers were war brides, as well, but that's secondary, I think, to the fact that these women have made a major contribution to our communities, where they've landed, and it would be only right to recognize them in some formal manner, if that's possible.

THE CHAIR: We should open that up for discussion. Do members of the committee have a specific role that they think we could play, a way to recognize them?

The member for Digby-Annapolis.

HAROLD THERIAULT: Is there an association, someone who heads up the war brides, that could be contacted?

THE CHAIR: Yes, there is.

HAROLD THERIAULT: Maybe we could have them in to do a presentation.

THE CHAIR: We could. One of the things that I was going to mention is, of course, leading up to November 11th, there are a couple of these guests who should come in first, I would suggest probably the Youth Remembrance, and we might want to have the flexibility to bring them in first. A lot of their events are geared around Remembrance Day. As well as Veterans Affairs Canada, to come in to talk about the new Charter.

The war brides event will be taking place in early November. I was invited, along with the Speaker of the House, to an event in July at Pier 21. The War Brides of Canada held their annual meeting here. During that period of time, they were talking about the events that are going to take place. I apologize for not having the exact date, but I think it's either November 7th or 8th when it begins, when they arrive. There may be a role for us to participate in that event, in the sense of either sponsoring a luncheon or something, but I think we need to talk to the Speaker about that, and whether or not he is playing any role in his role as Speaker of the House and whether or not he figures we can be part of that.

As a committee, we don't have the ability, to my knowledge, to sponsor something or to spend money. The House has already recognized this year as the Year of the War Bride. I'm not sure whether or not the committee sees another role for us.

ALFIE MACLEOD: Mr. Chairman, what I had in mind when I brought it to the forefront was maybe something as simple as a certificate from this committee, again a certificate of appreciation. I know there have been ones by the province. When you consider the very nature of this committee, in a lot of ways the war brides are veterans in their own right. I would just bring it forward for that reason.

THE CHAIR: If it's the wish of the committee, perhaps we can put together maybe a certificate, to see if that's what you had in mind. Maybe all of us, as committee members, could sign it and send it on. I would ask the committee if they would give me permission to actually speak to the Speaker of the House to see if there's not a role for us to play around the November 7th or 8th events that are going to take place here in Halifax.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

DAVID WILSON: Even if it's just us showing up at one of their events with some Nova Scotia pins and a certificate might be worthwhile.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIR: Just in the list of the five, in terms of coming in to make presentations, I think it is important that we have the Youth Remembrance come in first. Does anyone have an urgency to invite one of the other groups in next, or can we leave the committee with some flexibility to just contact these organizations and bring them in when they can fit it into their schedules?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIR: You guys are all making me nervous, you're just kind of agreeing. What's going on here? (Laughter)

As a committee, we have five groups that we're going to attempt to bring in to make a presentation. I think that's probably enough, and we can expand on that as we move forward. It has been the custom in the past that we've met on a monthly basis as a

committee. I'm not sure whether or not each caucus has a preference to what day that is. I know Community Services was meeting the third Thursday of every month . . .

DARLENE HENRY: We are the second Thursday.

THE CHAIR: Does anyone have any problem with that continuing? So the second Thursday of October will be our next meeting date. That's October 12th.

ALFIE MACLEOD: That's the second Tuesday.

THE CHAIR: That would be the Tuesday after Thanksgiving.

WAYNE GAUDET: Depending on when your witnesses are available.

THE CHAIR: Yes, but we will gear for that. I just wanted to make people aware. We will be contacting Youth Remembrance to come in. They have actually contacted me a couple of times, wanting to come in right away. So if they're flexible enough, we will go with that, but we will confirm October 12th with everyone. I would just ask you to tentatively pencil that in at this time, then we can move forward.

You also have in front of you a piece of correspondence from a Mr. Thompson - sorry, from a Kate Power to a Mr. Thompson - regarding Veterans Affairs. It's really sent out to you for a bit of . . .

GORDON GOSSE: It's Kyte Power.

THE CHAIR: Kyte Power, sorry. That was sent out to us just as a bit of information.

DARLENE HENRY: That was just mailed to you, it's not in front of you.

THE CHAIR: It was just acknowledging the wonderful treatment they received in the veterans wing and I'll let the member for Cape Breton Nova speak on that.

GORDON GOSSE: Law Power, Sr. - his son wrote a letter to all three Leaders of all Parties and most of the MLAs in Cape Breton, I think - and I hope everybody received it - about his dad. Law Power was involved in the - he was parachuted twice, I guess, during World War II and the second time was captured. The movie *The Great Escape* was based on some of his part in the "Great Escape".

There was a beautiful article, I think, accompanying the letter by the *Ottawa Sun* about how Mr. Power was a boxer from Cape Breton before he went into the Armed Forces and whatever else, and how they deceived the Germans by building a boxing ring. Contrary to the movie, that's how they were doing the tunnelling, by building the boxing ring, during the "Great Escape" so they could not be seen as they were tunnelling. It was a beautiful article.

I had the pleasure of visiting Mr. Power on numerous occasions when he was in the Taigh Na Mara Veterans Wing in Glace Bay and a few times for his 87th birthday, I think. He was quite an extraordinary gentleman and a great Canadian hero. I think his son was just talking about the treatment he received at the Taigh Na Mara Veterans Wing in Glace Bay and how the family felt about his life and how the long-term care facility catered to their dad and specialists. He actually has two sons who are in the RCMP, one stationed in Pictou and one stationed in Moncton. This gentleman who wrote the letter works for 911 and the other son was a school teacher.

It just talked about his father's life and how happy the family was with the treatment he received in his time of need. He had Alzheimer's and brain cancer. I thought that was the gist of the letter. I personally feel he was one of the last people in that "Great Escape" where the men were all killed afterwards, I guess 50 men were killed during that. I guess in the movie Hollywood portrayed it in a different way, but Mr. Power actually took part in that. I think he was just acknowledging that and he was a great Canadian hero.

THE CHAIR: Yes, and it was just acknowledging the treatment that his father received, it was nice. I know that all of us have constituents, veterans who have received care. I'm fortunate enough to have a veterans wing in my constituency. It's nice to hear from family members who acknowledge and let us know how they feel about their parents being treated. We wanted to make sure that everyone received that letter, just for your information.

I don't know if anyone has any further business for the committee. That was easy. So we'll move for October 12th and try to have these members come in.

WAYNE GAUDET: I move to adjourn.

THE CHAIR: Accepted, thank you. The committee is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9:25 a.m.]