

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Thursday, October 11, 2007

Committee Room 1

Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Harold Theriault (Chair)
Keith Bain
Patrick Dunn
Chuck Porter
Gordon Gosse
David Wilson (Sackville-Cobequid)
Percy Paris
Manning MacDonald
Wayne Gaudet

[Harold Theriault was replaced by Diana Whalen.]

In Attendance:

Darlene Henry
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping

Ronald Griffis
National President



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2007

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIR
Chuck Porter

THE CHAIR: Let's get started, ladies and gentlemen. I guess the ladies aren't here yet. We are waiting for one more - Ms. Whalen should be here shortly. Just before we get started, we'll go around the table, as per normal. Maybe we'll start with you, Mr. Gosse.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Good morning. We welcome you, Mr. Griffis. It's good to have you here this morning to represent the Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping. We won't take up much of your time, we'll let you go right to your presentation and we look forward to it.

RONALD GRIFFIS: Thank you. On behalf of the Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping, thank you for inviting us to be here and I appreciate the invitation.

The Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping was incorporated on October 24, 1991. Presently, we have 27 chapters across Canada, from St. John's, Newfoundland to Victoria, British Columbia. We have nothing up in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. We just opened another chapter in St. Catharines, Ontario, just less than six weeks ago. As I've indicated, we have 27 chapters with our headquarters chapter in Ottawa being the largest with about 200 members. Our members are in the vicinity of 1,086 right across Canada. I happen to be the national president of the association and as it is, I live in the Valley. Our last president, of course, was from Calgary, Alberta but I happen to live in the Valley so I gather that's why I am here today.

I noticed on the invitation that the focus of the meeting will be an overview of the Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping - its duties and activities in Canada's peacekeeping roles at home and around the world. Before I get to that, if in fact I get to that, I want to tell you what our constitution indicates the objects of the association are:

- to constitute an association for Canadians who served with the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces
- to perpetuate the memories and deeds of all of our fallen comrades who lost their lives in defence of freedom
- to co-operate with other veterans' organizations having comparable aims and objects
- to foster unity and comradeship among its members
- to establish regional and provincial bodies throughout Canada
- to donate to schools and public libraries literature on Canada's participation in the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces
- to encourage, promote, engage in or support national, provincial and community services for charitable purposes
- to raise and coordinate funds for assisting those mentioned in the preceding paragraphs and to do all such things that are incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above objects

It is an interesting one here - the association shall be non-political and non-sectarian. Of course, we can't go anywhere without being involved with politicians. It's just the nature of the game, I gather.

The association, with respect to its duties and activities - many of the activities nowadays have to do with seeking greater and better benefits for veterans. Previously, I came into the city and I left with the clerk a booklet called "Keeping The Promise. The Future of Health Benefits for Canada's War Veterans". This particular document - the association was part of the committee that put together this document and the main person with respect to this document is Dr. Marshall. He is a professor in an American university.

It took 10 years to put this book together. The book presently is being updated with the next meeting of the Gerontological Advisory Council to Veterans Affairs Canada, meeting in Calgary, Alberta, on November 4th. Most of the persons on that committee are volunteers and there are six veterans' organizations represented on that committee: the Royal Canadian Legion; the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans; the National Council of Veterans Association - you may know that as the War Amps or Cliff Chatterton's group; our group, the Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping; and the Gulf War Veterans' Association of Canada.

We all played an important part in creating this particular booklet and it was released in Ottawa in November 2006, just before Remembrance Day in 2006. The interesting thing about this particular booklet is it characterizes the difference between being a war veteran, World War II - bearing in mind, World War I, there's only one veteran left from that particular conflict - so this booklet refers mainly to World War II and Korea. Korea, of course, is divided up until 1953, when after 1953 it became a peacekeeping operation as opposed to a police action and some people now call it a war. So the peacekeeping part of this is unique in that it looks after the veterans from 1939 to 1953, then from 1953 to the present day it takes on another life with respect to the benefits that are available to the veterans. So it is our particular occupation, our particular object to make the benefits better for the veterans. As you well know, Halifax being a military community, Greenwood being a military community, Gagetown in New Brunswick - all of those communities have a great many veterans who are retired.

The interesting part about this is, the war veterans take on a different definition whether or not you were overseas. If you were overseas, you are entitled to certain benefits and if you did not make it overseas, those benefits will be cut off even if you are a veteran of World War II. An example would be if you took your training in 1944 and came to Halifax before being shipped out and before you were shipped out the war ended - you are not entitled to certain benefits that your colleagues who were over there are entitled to. Veterans Affairs has been extremely fair with respect to that particular difficulty in that they will bend the rules to assist the veterans who fall into that particular category.

As I have indicated, this booklet was 10 years in the making. We just celebrated the 10th Anniversary in early summer in Charlottetown with respect to this booklet and, as I've indicated, it will be updated on a regular basis. The interesting part with respect to this booklet is that it has to be done immediately, the actions have to be done immediately and that, of course, is where politics comes into play. Bearing in mind that presently we are losing 2,000 veterans a month who pass away and as the average age of World War II and Korean veterans increases - presently it is 83 years of age - as that increases it is reasonable that the death rate is going to increase and there are only 220,000 veterans out there and of those 220,000 veterans, 113,000 veterans from that particular period have not made contact with Veterans Affairs. They are still out there and Veterans Affairs is still waiting for them to contact them.

The reason I mentioned that is that along with this booklet and the Gerontological Advisory Council, there is another group of veterans and interested persons who are part of what is called the New Veterans Charter Advisory Council, and taking into consideration the injuries that are currently taking place in Afghanistan and the death and disability that is arising as a result of that, there is a calling for new treatment and new issues with respect to what the benefits are for the veterans.

I gather you've read in the paper that the veterans, as I've indicated, the New Veterans Charter is a living document. It was proclaimed in power in 2005 and it is constantly being updated, being updated with respect to the benefits. The benefits I talk about are of such a nature that - to the best of my knowledge at this time - if you receive a minor injury, they'll keep you in the Forces for three years. After that particular time period, if you're not able to pass certain tests, they'll release you and the benefits that kick in from Veterans Affairs sometimes take up to a year to kick in. So with that in mind, the veteran who is suffering a disability is unemployed and unemployable, to the best of my knowledge at this time, for up to a year. Once again Veterans Affairs is addressing that and they are prepared to bend the rules so that there's a benefit to the veteran.

The Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping is part of that committee, once again, and as I've indicated, it is an ongoing process. It is called a Living Charter and it changes from time to time. There was a meeting in Ottawa on October 5th where there's an indication that there will be an effort by Veterans Affairs to make certain allowances before the year's end, bearing in mind that a lot of these things have to take place yesterday and not tomorrow, because of what is going on in the services right now.

As I've indicated, those are mainly our activities, taking into consideration the invitation indicates duties and activities. The duties fall into the category of what I mentioned with respect to the objects of our association. Bearing in mind that we have 27 chapters across Canada, we always work in concert with other veterans' organizations, the Legion being one of them; ANAVETS, the Army, Navy and Air Force being another one; and in the particular case in Greenwood, our association works hand in glove with the Legion and with the Royal Canadian Air Force Association.

We work together. On November 11th, Remembrance Day, we parade together and we lay wreaths together at that particular time. Right across Canada we work together with all of these organizations, bearing in mind that the main reason for our organizations being around today is to ask the politicians to make the necessary adjustments so that they are treated fairly.

The veteran that we know today basically signs a blank cheque, giving everything that he has to the Dominion of Canada, and as we know with Afghanistan, up to and including his life. As a matter of fact, it is today that at the Wall of Honour in Calgary, Alberta, at Garrison Green - which used to be the base in Alberta - that the latest name, Corporal Hornburg, is being etched onto the Wall of Honour in Calgary. The Wall of Honour in Calgary has all of the names of the persons who have been killed, who lost their

lives in peacekeeping operations and that is to include peace support operations and peacemaking operations that involve the Armed Forces of Canada.

Along with the etching of Corporal Hornburg's name on the wall today, there is a project going to be given out today that they're going to have to raise funds for a second wall. When the wall was put together and recorded about four years ago it was suggested that there would be enough room on the wall to last the wall 60 years, taking into consideration the number of people who have been killed or who passed away under peacekeeping, peace support or peacemaking operations. But with Afghanistan and the 71 casualties and other casualties arriving, there's only room on the wall for about 30 more names and then they are planning a campaign to raise funds for the new wall.

[9:15 a.m.]

I point out that although our association is involved to a great extent with respect to this, it is a Calgary chapter project. Each association chapter has various projects, whether that indicates giving to schools or any other projects, such as the Izzy doll which was created in memory of Corporal Mark Isfeld who lost his life in Bosnia-Herzegovina. His mother put together a campaign to make the Izzy doll. I believe that over 10,000 Izzy dolls have been made, created and sent overseas so that when it comes to it, the soldiers on patrol can give out these dolls to the children who are present. Once again, that is a project of our chapter in Victoria. As I've indicated, there are several projects right across Canada that are part of our association's legacy in that we want to do things for the veterans and do as much as we possibly can.

In "Keeping The Promise. The Future of Health Benefits for Canada's War Veterans", one of the things that our association was part of is the characteristics that will indicate what benefits are available to you if you become an applicant for Veterans Affairs Canada, if you are an applicant to that particular thing. When it first came out, there were 14 characteristics in the various profiles to indicate what type of benefits you would get.

Our association was part and parcel of the operation and that has been reduced, as of October 5th, from 14 categories to five categories, indicating that there is a greater percentage of benefits for a greater percentage of people, as opposed to being at one end of the scale and the other. The 14 categories have been reduced down to five categories, which we feel is certainly a step in the right direction.

As I've indicated, we're part of the committee on "Keeping The Promise. The Future of Health Benefits for Canada's War Veterans". We're also part of the committee with respect to the New Veterans Charter and that charter, as I've indicated, was assented to on May 13, 2005.

That mainly takes care of our duties and responsibilities with respect to an organization. I do point out that our association is composed of all veterans, in that you must be a veteran in United Nations Peacekeeping to be a member of the association. I appreciate that there are other associations that use the word "veterans" or have "veterans" in their particular title, but on the same token - although those veterans do a tremendous amount of good work - not all of the members of those associations are veterans.

As I've indicated, that's mainly what our association is all about and that is mainly with respect to our duties and activities. With respect to the future of its duties and activities, just recently, at the end of September, the association became a partner or a participant in an organization called Job Placement Partnership with Right Management. This is a company from England that has been awarded a three-year contract by Veterans Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence and their particular responsibility will be to find employment for veterans or for members of the Armed Forces who are leaving the Armed Forces. They will assist them to meet the employment needs of the veterans. That has to do with preparing resumés and, in our particular case, it is to advise Right Management of employment opportunities that are available in our community. We just entered into that particular phase of our duties and activities, although I am under the impression that it won't be until October 15th that this particular contract will be mentioned by Mr. Harper or Mr. Thompson. Job Placement Partnership with Right Management have been very proactive in that they came down to see us to seek our participation in this. I point out that all other veterans' organizations, I understand, will be part and parcel of this.

In short, what it amounts to is that there is a person getting out of the Armed Forces, this particular company will help them find a job. There is also an activity that is going to be conducted that the members of the Armed Forces will be given a preference, if there is a job in the Civil Service and they have the qualifications to fill that particular occupation.

On the same token, there is also a move put forth by the Department of National Defence that indicates that they are going to try to keep those soldiers who have a disability in the Armed Services, if their particular employment will assist the Armed Services - if they are a specialist of a sort and they can fit into a particular need. For instance, if they've lost their foot or have some other disability of that nature where they cannot be - for want of a better word - 100 per cent fit to do overseas duty, the Armed Forces, the Department of National Defence, will keep them in their occupation for that particular thing. As I said, that's one of our newest things that our association is going to do.

Last year our association - taking into consideration once again the invitation indicated duties and activities in Canada's peacekeeping roles at home and around the world - with respect to the 50th Anniversary of UN Peacekeeping, we participated in various

panels across the country. I participated in the panel that took place here in Halifax at the university. The title of the booklet that has been produced with respect to this is: "Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding: Lessons From The Past, Building For The Future". The invitation indicated that what our thought is of the future. This has been reduced to 190 pages with respect to the peacekeeping that started in 1956, or in 1953 if you include Korea, to peacemaking and peacebuilding.

It would be just absolutely wrong of me to try to summarize this particular book in five or 10 minutes but what it amounts to is, with all due respect to the book and with all due respect to the other items, it is reasonable - taking into consideration the political climate in Ottawa as I read it, and that's my particular slant on it - that Canada will get back to peacekeeping, as opposed to peacemaking, as is taking place in Afghanistan. That's only reasonable; people are concerned about what is taking place in Afghanistan and peacemaking, of course, has a lot to do with building responsible activities in the foreign countries, other than just in a war-like nature. There are other aspects of peacemaking and peacekeeping that take into consideration what is going on.

As I've indicated, this particular book is from the United Nations Association of Canada. I do point out that since 1956, when United Nations Emergency Force No. 1 was prepared to go to the Middle East, that several of the members who were prepared to go and did go to the Middle East on the HMCS Bonaventure and the HMCS Magnificent, they are members of our chapter in Greenwood. They are older gentlemen but, on the same token, they are quite proud of their association with United Nations Emergency Force No. 1 that took place in the Suez Canal.

Can I answer any questions?

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Griffis. Just before we go to questions I'll welcome Ms. Whalen this morning to our committee, it is nice to have you here. Perhaps we'll start with Mr. Gosse, if you like. If not, we'll move on.

GORDON GOSSE: Well, thank you very much. I'm just wondering with your organization now moving forward with trying to help veterans receive the VIP program, is there any news in that area of the Veterans Independence Program for peacekeeping or other veterans?

RONALD GRIFFIS: Yes. As I've indicated, this will not become knowledgeable until the new year but they are going to - to the best of my knowledge at this time - rebundle the existing VIP services to offer access to a broad range of needs-based services that address the risk of loss of independence. So the answer to your question - to the best of my knowledge, at this time - is yes.

GORDON GOSSE: And the way that they're saying that is needs-based programs

...

RONALD GRIFFIS: Yes.

GORDON GOSSE: . . . provided for widows of veterans and veterans.

RONALD GRIFFIS: Well, I think her name is Mrs. Joyce Carter - yes, I saw a clip on television where Mr. Thompson indicated that in the next budget - if it in fact does come to pass - that will take place.

GORDON GOSSE: Well, thank you very much. And your organization, they also promote, like health promotion activities with the veterans to get more active, to keep them longer in their own homes. Is there any proactive approach to doing this within the organization, providing services for veterans?

RONALD GRIFFIS: Yes, Veterans Affairs Canada has entered into a new program, or will be entering into a new program. I don't know if it's public knowledge yet, but it has to do with keeping the promise and it has to do with the benefits. It is the desire of Veterans Affairs Canada that where they can, they would like to keep the veteran who requires assistance in their community. If that involves the assistance program with the health services, which is a branch of the Gerontological Advisory Council - we just completed preparing a document with respect to that - they want to get the veteran involved in activities that will lead to a healthier life. For instance, one of the basic activities would be walking. Another basic activity would be social activity in the community - just participating in groups. Of course, where there is a YMCA or a YWCA, these things will certainly be involved.

GORDON GOSSE: Thank you very much. Also, before I finish up, I'd like to give my regrets from my colleague, Mr. Percy Paris, from Waverley-Fall River-Beaver Bank who has a doctor's appointment this morning and couldn't get out of it.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr. Manning MacDonald, any questions this morning?

MANNING MACDONALD: Just a couple of comments that you might want to react to. Every once in a while you see on parade the Blue Berets. It always fascinated me that a lot of people would ask, and still ask me - and I'm a life member of the Legion in Sydney and a former Naval Reserve Officer - it always amazes me that people continue to ask me who are they and what their role is here. I'm just wondering - and perhaps I'll put an honourable connotation to the word "lobbyist" by saying - does your association have

any lobbyists out there who are continuing to lobby with government for public recognition, and/or do you have any public relations campaigns going on that would make your organization instantly recognizable?

It is such an important organization - younger people, particularly today, are saying, who are they? They see the traditional Cape Breton Highlanders, in my case, or the Army, Navy & Air Force Veterans in Canada Association, but there seems to be less emphasis put on recognition and sustainability, I guess, in the public eye of the important role that your organization played. Maybe you might want to comment on that.

[9:30 a.m.]

RONALD GRIFFIS: Yes, thank you for bringing that to my attention. Just yesterday I wrote an e-mail to Prime Minister Harper. Over the year 2007, our organization was invited to attend before the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs in response to a Private Member's Bill out of Sudbury, Ontario - federally - indicating that the 9th of August would be a national Peacekeeping Day. We made two or three presentations to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs and at the conclusion of those committee appearances - my sense of humour takes over - it was almost a love-in. The NDP, the Bloc Québécois, the Liberals and the Conservatives all gathered in the room where we were giving testimony and were shaking hands and had photographs taken - and Mr. Stoffer was there - and taking all kinds of pictures.

What that meant at that particular time is they passed - the committee passed the Peacekeeping Act for the 9th of August to be recognized as a federal Peacekeepers Day. This would not be a holiday but it would be to recognize the peacekeepers, or in French, casques bleus.

Just yesterday, I wrote Prime Minister Harper and I asked him - this particular document has made it through wherever it has to go and the info page on the Internet indicates that all it has to do is receive Royal Assent from the Governor General. So I asked Mr. Harper yesterday, can he not get this document to the Governor General so that it can receive Royal Assent for the upcoming ceremonies that are going to take place during the Remembrance Week? So as I've indicated, that particular document - I think it is Bill C-287 - has been passed and it's ready to go but I don't know what is holding it up. Bearing in mind, it is not going to cost the government a penny, save and except for the printing of the document because it is not a holiday, it just recognizes peacekeeping. I thought I put the Act in my material and I don't have it before me.

As I've indicated, all it has to receive is Royal Assent. We were hoping that it would be for the 9th of August that just took place, bearing in mind that Nova Scotia, I think on

May 14, 2003, indicated that Peacekeeping Day in the Province of Nova Scotia was passed. It was published by order of the Legislature on May 14th. We were hoping that it would be then. Along with the Veterans Ombudsman, that particular money for the Veterans Ombudsman is there. There is \$5 million set aside for the Ombudsman and for his office and there are two persons from Veterans Affairs Canada - Louise Wallace and another gentleman from Ottawa - who are on temporary assignment to the Ombudsman's Office, although he has not been appointed, nor has that office been created. So I asked Mr. Harper yesterday where we stand on this and I have yet to receive a reply. There is no doubt in my mind that when I get home today that I'll have the information at hand.

That's my sense of humour coming out again. (Laughter)

MANNING MACDONALD: We do experience from time to time the holdup in getting Royal Assent on different bills. We've gone through that exercise in Nova Scotia a number of times.

RONALD GRIFFIS: Yes, thank you for that, but the 9th of August is slated to be - there was one hiccup in that particular indication, that the Bloc Québécois wanted the words casques bleus in the Act, whereas we suggested that it would be peacekeepers as opposed to casques bleus. Casques bleus - the translation was blue helmets, and once again would people recognize the blue helmets as being peacekeepers, although bearing in mind that that is what took place in 1956 and that is why the United Nations has this particular type of blue with it - it was to distinguish the United Nations Forces in the Suez from the British Forces and from the other forces that were there.

The blue helmets play a part but on the same token, there are more peacekeepers than there are those who recognize that particular definition.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Dunn.

PATRICK DUNN: Just one or two questions. You mentioned earlier in your presentation, 1953 onwards that the benefits were different or are different than prior to 1953?

RONALD GRIFFIS: To the best of my knowledge.

PATRICK DUNN: Is it significant, the difference?

RONALD GRIFFIS: Yes. One of the main differences is if a veteran requires extensive service, serious contact, he is entitled to a bed. He is entitled to either a veteran's

bed or a contract bed and that's where the difference lies. That's where Veterans Affairs Canada is trying their best to get around that particular difficulty.

An example would be where a veteran is entitled to a contract bed but on the same token, if he had housekeeping and grounds maintenance and a visit on a regular basis from community-spirited persons such as Meals on Wheels that would be assisted by Veterans Affairs, that would keep him in his own community as opposed to getting that bed in a hospital, say, in Middleton or in Halifax. So that's where the difference lies; you either get maximum service but in some cases you don't need the maximum service, you don't need a hospital bed, you just need help. That's where the difference comes in.

PATRICK DUNN: One last question, I'm curious, I think you mentioned there may be 220,000 veterans?

RONALD GRIFFIS: Yes, to the best of my knowledge.

PATRICK DUNN: Okay - of that number, how many did not serve overseas? What's the breakdown, the numbers that went over and the numbers that - because the benefits are different there also.

RONALD GRIFFIS: I don't have an answer for that question. I don't think Veterans Affairs does either. What takes place is of the 113,000 who have not contacted Veterans Affairs - perhaps it would be a person like myself who, when I left the Forces I was gainfully employed and my pension comes from another source, as opposed to Veterans Affairs Canada. My medical coverage comes from another source, so I don't have a need to contact Veterans Affairs Canada. Therefore, I am not a client of theirs. Although I can apply to be a client, I would say, why? My medical is covered by an insurance company and my pension is another type of pension as opposed to VAC.

So of that 113,000, Veterans Affairs can't tell you how many were overseas. An example would be, there's a gentleman in Chateaugay, Quebec, who just contacted me recently, his name is Joe Culligan. He's the type of person who went through his training and came to Halifax to be shipped overseas and the war ended. So he has applied for certain benefits from Veterans Affairs and those benefits or that request has been turned down. Bearing in mind that Mr. Culligan is not receiving a pension from VAC but he is receiving a private pension and all things equal, Mr. Culligan is getting along quite well. He has his son helping him, he has his daughter-in-law helping him, so I gather Veterans Affairs looked at that and said, you may be entitled to certain things but you're not entitled to VIP.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr. Wilson.

DAVID WILSON: I'd like to make a motion, if I could, or do you want me to wait until later?

THE CHAIR: We have other questions. Perhaps we'll wait and we'll come back to you, David, if that's okay. Ms. Whalen.

DIANA WHALEN: Just a few, thank you. Perhaps I missed this in the beginning of the presentation - I'm sorry if that's the case - but I wanted to ask you about the Peacekeeping Centre in the Valley. I was reading the Hansard from May 2003, when someone else from your association was here and they talked a little bit about the Peacekeeping Centre. I'm just wondering, are you still closely affiliated with that?

RONALD GRIFFIS: No, we're not.

DIANA WHALEN: Not in the least?

RONALD GRIFFIS: I'll tell you why, and it's the distance that we have to travel. To be quite frank with you, most of our members are what might be called senior citizens. As senior citizens, they have little idiosyncracies that say, well, I'm not going there just for an hour's meal, I'm not going to drive the 50 miles or something like that.

We have an association in that one of our members lives in one of the houses that were put up for sale and we speak to him on a regular basis. He also participated in the peacekeeping and peace-building seminars that were held right across Canada. We go to the Peacekeeping Centre once a year for some of their activities, but we're not closely associated with them. Bearing in mind I believe they have a different approach to things in that they're teaching people, they're teaching officers how to deal with certain things in their own countries as opposed to peacemaking and peace-building. Such as in Aldershot, which is just north of Kentville, they are training officers from other armed forces from around the world to be able to address the needs in their own country.

DIANA WHALEN: It's an important function, there's no question about that. I just wondered whether they would have the benefit of some of your input along the way.

On the issue of Peacekeeping Day, which is August 9th - and as you said, we proclaimed that in Nova Scotia - that was news to me. I must say, as a member of the Legislature, I wasn't aware of that. I'm thinking that it hasn't been properly promoted up to this point, even in our own province, although I recognize you're talking about a federal bill which might give it more prominence.

RONALD GRIFFIS: Yes.

DIANA WHALEN: What have we done on August 9th? Have there been ceremonies around the province that I'm somehow unaware of?

RONALD GRIFFIS: Yes, our chapter in Halifax is headquartered in Dartmouth and there's a parade over there near the Legion at the Cenotaph on the 9th of August. We had a parade - this year in Greenwood we had a late afternoon supper and get-together to celebrate Peacekeeping Day, and also in Camp Borden, Ontario, there were other ceremonies. In the Niagara area there is a race track down that way where all of the races were named after peacekeeping activities and the peacekeepers were on parade there.

Right across Canada, we have activities and one of our main activities is in Calgary at the Wall of Honour and this year I happened to be there. It was attended by Mr. Thompson, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, and members of the Alberta Legislature and the Deputy Minister of Veterans Affairs, Ms. Tining. At that particular celebration we had, I'm going to say about 700 people present and we also had the relatives of the persons who were killed in Afghanistan. They were there to see the unveiling of their loved one's name on the wall.

DIANA WHALEN: I'm glad to hear that. I think we could be doing more here in our communities as well, particularly as it follows just two years after the Year of the Veteran that we celebrated in every community, and we did in my riding of Halifax Clayton Park as well.

RONALD GRIFFIS: One of the difficulties is accessing funds. As I've indicated, we're not political and the funds that we raise are from dinners we put on and things of that nature, and dues that are assessed. When you apply to Veterans Affairs Canada, although they will assist you with the application, to secure funds from Veterans Affairs Canada is quite a lengthy process. I think there are something like 20 questions that you must answer and some of them are hypothetical; for instance, indicating how many people from outside of the organization will attend the function. Of course, we just don't know the answer to that.

For instance, on November 11th in the Kingston-Greenwood area, all of the organizations participate in the laying of wreaths by the Royal Canadian Legion. When we go there there are well over 500 people in attendance. So at the Air Force Association or at our meeting place, there's nobody there, we're all over with the Royal Canadian Legion.

DIANA WHALEN: I think that's a good place to be, where you're all together. In my riding of Halifax Clayton Park, we have a new memorial for the Korean War veterans.

I wasn't sure if you were aware of that but they would certainly be, perhaps, members of your association as well? Have you served in Korea? That's a question.

RONALD GRIFFIS: Well they can be. What takes place is there comes to a certain time when the veterans like to go to the organization that represents them or represents their activities while they were in the service. Yes, we have Korean War veterans in our organization and we have World War II veterans, although not too many, of course. There's a certain pool of veterans out there and they seem to go to the appropriate organizations, such as the Gulf War Veterans Association of Canada or the Canadian Peacekeepers Veterans Association, their activities were in Bosnia. Now I would imagine there's going to be another organization that is going to come to light very soon about Afghanistan - the Canadian veterans of Afghanistan.

I appreciate that the Legion is - as I've indicated there's just a certain pool of veterans where they go to. Now to the best of my knowledge at this time the Legion has 400,000 members across Canada and they are a very well organized organization and they do a tremendous amount of good work, but on the same token, 68 per cent of their members are non-veterans.

What has happened is organizations have had to go that way to seek membership. The Army, Navy, Air Force veterans - they have the same thing where spouses become members or children of members become members, although they don't have any military service.

DIANA WHALEN: I'm actually a member of the Fairview Legion for the same reason - my father was in the military, not myself, so I know that they are reaching out. But I do think that knowing about August 9th is a chance for all of us in the Legislature to perhaps do things or support efforts in our own riding because that would have been something on August 9th, we could have done something at the Korean War Memorial.

I hope you visit it, it is a park actually. They built a gazebo and put up a plaque in honour of the veterans. It was opened only a year ago, last November 11th was our first ceremony at that site. It is such a new neighbourhood and I think it is very important that we continue to honour our veterans in brand new areas and not just in our older communities. So it is something that I hope you'll get a chance to see, or let me know and I'll take you there. Anyway, thank you.

RONALD GRIFFIS: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Bain.

KEITH BAIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you Mr. Griffis for your excellent presentation this morning. I want to go back to the number of veterans; you said that there are 220,000 veterans. When you initially said that and followed it up with the 113,000 who had not made contact with Veterans Affairs Canada, I thought my goodness, why? Am I correct in assuming that the majority of those 113,000 haven't contacted because they do not require the services?

[9:45 a.m.]

RONALD GRIFFIS: I would suggest that that is the main reason. I neglected to mention that Veterans Affairs Canada is receiving 15,000 to 20,000 applications a year - new applications for benefits. One of our arguments that we've put forth time and again is knowledge of what is available out there. For instance, you heard me talk about a man I am assisting in Montreal, Quebec - actually Chateauguay, Quebec. They don't know what's out there for them and we've suggested that there should be ads in all kinds of documents to indicate what is available, when it is available.

We put that forward and I would imagine in the new programs that are going to be there that hopefully that will take place, such as the activities of the veterans to do things to keep them in their home community.

KEITH BAIN: So then initially that's what I thought, there is a communications problem here that those people . . .

RONALD GRIFFIS: Yes.

KEITH BAIN: So it's a combination of both communicating and some of those who don't require the services.

RONALD GRIFFIS: Well, I'll give you an example; "Keeping The Promise", although it was produced in Ottawa and it was released in Ottawa, the members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs just received a copy because the Gerontological Advisory Council attended the standing committee and referred to the booklet and they didn't know what we were referring to, so we made arrangements for them to have the booklet, they weren't aware of it either.

Then there is this new booklet that just came out that I brought in, about death and disability programs and services. Less than two weeks ago, I sent it across Canada to each and every chapter and member that we have. They weren't aware of this and we're getting questions all the time about wills and about benefits that are available.

There's a companion booklet that goes with this that indicates that the Armed Forces bases should have this companion booklet to direct them as to who does what and where. So as I indicated, this booklet is just not known to everybody, although when I requested 100 copies they were in the mail the next day and it didn't take very long for me to get them.

As you indicated, it's a communication difficulty and we certainly don't have the money to communicate right across Canada but it should be done.

KEITH BAIN: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Bain. Mr. Wilson, you're on a motion?

DAVID WILSON: Yes, it may not be pertinent when Mr. Griffis returns home and has his information on the requests from the Prime Minister's Office but I'd like to make a motion that this Veterans Affairs Committee send a letter of encouragement to the federal government encouraging them to give Royal Assent to Bill C-287, ensuring that the recognition is followed through.

WAYNE GAUDET: I second the motion.

THE CHAIR: Any discussion on the motion? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried, and a good one. Thank you, Mr. Wilson.

Thank you, Mr. Griffis. Any final remarks before we close this morning?

RONALD GRIFFIS: Thank you for inviting me. I hope I've been able to share some information with you that you weren't aware of. As I've indicated, we're always available, we always hope to be available to do things. We try to do things to make our appearance in the community known. We can only do so much, as a gentleman mentioned, people always ask who are those persons in the blue berets.

I don't know if some of you looked at that CD or listened to that CD. The song just came out and I didn't have it in time for the 9th of August to send it to the radio stations in the Halifax area but Phyllis Wheaton, a performer from Calgary, Alberta, put together the blue beret song and it is quite a catchy song and it mentions, of course, Mr. Pearson in 1956. The other point of that is the other song on that particular CD put forth by her was about the Izzy doll. The Izzy doll is a campaign right across Canada by the Mark Isfeld Chapter in British Columbia, one of our chapters that gives these dolls out to the children.

As I've indicated, Phyllis Wheaton put all of that together and as a result of that particular song being around the world, she has been contacted by various veterans communities in Europe who have indicated that with the necessary changes, could they use that particular song as a background for their Web site and she has consented to that. So as I've indicated, it is quite a catchy tune. She has made a couple of changes to suit the people perhaps in Czechoslovakia or the Netherlands or places like that.

THE CHAIR: Well, thank you very much for a very informative session this morning and we look forward to seeing you again at some point.

RONALD GRIFFIS: Thanks very much. Once again, thanks for inviting us, we appreciate it.

THE CHAIR: Just a little bit of committee business. As you've all been just given a copy of a letter, correspondence from Mr. Samson with regard to Ms. Joyce Carter's appearance before this committee. We'll open the meeting to some discussion. Any comments? Anyone opposed to Ms. Carter appearing before this committee?

GORDON GOSSE: I'll second that.

THE CHAIR: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Thank you very much, we're simply done. Any other business before us today?

GORDON GOSSE: Next meeting date?

DARLENE HENRY: Well I was thinking that November 8th would be a better one for this meeting, only because we don't know when the House is going into session.

THE CHAIR: Do we agree with November 8th for the time being? Very good, thank you.

MANNING MACDONALD: It won't be in by the 8th, I can guarantee you, that we do know.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Manny, that we do know. Thanks very much everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9:51 a.m.]