

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**Thursday, April 9, 2009**

**Committee Room 1**

**Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command**

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**VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

Harold Theriault (Chair)  
Keith Bain  
Hon. James Muir  
Chuck Porter  
Gordon Gosse  
David Wilson (Sackville-Cobequid)  
Percy Paris  
Manning MacDonald  
Wayne Gaudet

In Attendance:

Kim Leadley  
Legislative Committee Clerk

**WITNESSES**

Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command

David Blanchard  
Command President

Jack Hatcher  
Command Treasurer

Steve Wessel  
Public Relations Chair

Roger Purnell  
Zone 13 Commander

Marc Gauthier  
Command Service Officer



House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, THURSDAY, APRIL 9, 2009**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**9:00 A.M.**

**CHAIR**

Harold Theriault

THE CHAIR: I would like to call this meeting to order and I would like to thank the veterans for coming this morning. First of all, I want to say to our committee members we have a little business to take care of after. I thought I had better get that in now before you start leaving, so don't rush away when we're done.

First of all, I'd like to introduce ourselves to the presenters and then I believe Mr. Jack Hatcher would like to tell us who is going to be presenting here today. So with that, we'll start with you, Mr. Porter, please.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Mr. Hatcher.

JACK HATCHER: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for inviting us and I'd like to introduce our presenters today. I'll start with Mr. Dave Blanchard, our Provincial President; Comrade Steve Wessel, our Provincial Chairman; Comrade Roger Purnell, Zone 13 Commander; and last but not least, our Service Officer, Comrade Mark Gauthier.

THE CHAIR: Okay, with that you can do your presentation to us and maybe after there'll be a few questions and we'll go around the table. It's all very informal here so just take your time, relax. We always have good meetings at Veterans Affairs. We're here to listen to you and your concerns and your issues and anything that we can do, we can speak about that later, to help you out. So with that, the floor is yours.

JACK HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This morning we have actually six small presentations but very important ones to the Legion. I'll start with Comrade Dave Blanchard and he has three that he would like to present. You have them all in your booklet in running order.

DAVID BLANCHARD: Thank you, Comrade Jack and committee members. My first presentation will be on the one of Salsa Bingo and iBingo. (Interruption) Okay, I have them on the wrong rotation, Jack, you got them in the wrong rotation. (Laughter)

Again, we're still dealing with bingo, though. It's on what we call the bingo cookie jar or loonie jar or toonie jar. The loonie jar and the cookie jar, the same thing, are common names for this game played at all bingo halls. For players to participate in this game, they must pay \$1 or \$2 or whatever amount the bingo hall sets.

They have a bingo book, they have their bingo books stamped to certify that they have paid. A random bingo number is picked at the beginning of the evening of the full night of bingo games and if one of the players wins the game with this selected number, they win the pot. I might say that sometimes these pots can get up into thousands of dollars.

All the money that is paid out in this pot goes back to the winning player. That is, the bingo hall makes no money on this whatsoever, not one red penny. The bingo hall keeps, as I said, none of the money. This pot may build for weeks or months and thus sometimes can be worth up to or maybe over \$10,000.

Our problem with this is that we have to pay 2.5 per cent taxes on the money, even though we keep none of it. This problem was brought up at a meeting we had with Mr. Brad Conrad - I think he's still the Director of Lottery Gaming, Nova Scotia Gaming Corporation. His advice was that this would have to be discussed with the Attorney General's Department and the Finance Department.

We would appreciate it very much if this committee would look into this matter for us and see if the tax on the cookie jar can be discontinued. Gentlemen, that's my brief on that and I'll try to answer any questions that come forward on it.

THE CHAIR: Maybe first we'll do all the presentations and we can take notes as we go and then we can do the questioning after you're all done with your presentations.

DAVID BLANCHARD: Okay, fair ball. The next one is on Salsa Bingo. You didn't mix this one up yet. My next presentation again has to do with bingo. This is on Salsa Bingo and iBingo. I don't know if any of you are familiar with these or not. Salsa Bingo is played on a bingo ticket that is purchased at any local lottery centre or on-line. This game is played the same way any other bingo game is played and the prizes start at \$400 and go up to a jackpot that can be more, well up into the thousands. I think it was here that not too long ago somebody won around \$6,000 or \$7,000 on this.

There are immeasurable large prizes that Legion bingo halls cannot afford or aren't allowed by the law in Nova Scotia. We have a law that states we can't have a prize over \$15,000. This game can be played 24 hours a day, except approximately for two minutes at 10:00 a.m. each day, to allow for regular draw maintenance.

There are two different ways to play iBingo - single player and multiple players. These games are purchased on-line and the game is played like any other bingo game. When you are playing a multi-player, it features a chat option so you can talk with other players while you are in the game. There are chat room etiquette rules. Single player games are played on your own and you can control the speed of the game; iBingo also have large prizes which cannot be matched by local bingo halls.

Our concerns about these two on-line bingo games are that they are drawing our bingo players away, especially those who smoke. Now I might just add to this that there's no smoking in the bingo halls but you can sit in your own home and smoke all you want to and play these games on-line on the computer.

Many of our bingo players who do come to our games are spending less money at our games and usually, as most people, you have a budget. A lot of our bingo players say okay, I have \$50 a week to spend on bingo so if I've already spent \$30 on one of these bingos, that leaves the bingo hall to get the last part, \$20. This means that we are making less money and, in some cases, our prizes have to be decreased and sad to say, some branches have suspended their games.

Bingo revenues are very important to branches as they help to fund our capital projects and community projects - veterans' projects that we have and also community projects. When one plays on-line bingo it is possible to play cards by credit cards, debit cards, electronic funds transfer or Web cash; there's all kinds of ways. You can even open yourself up a bank account with them in Moncton and you use it. I guess that's what the Web cash one is. All of these payment options are not available in bingo halls, we can't do any of these things.

As of March 2009, a Legion with VLT machines will not be allowed to have an ATM or an ABM which will accept a credit card. Now there's another restriction. Most of our Legions in Nova Scotia are having hard times financially. They are struggling to continue to be able to support our veterans, youth, seniors and community projects. Bingo has always been a reliable source of income but there have been many changes. We cannot possibly compete with Atlantic Lotto and the Internet. Non-profit charitable organizations for many years have been successful in raising these much-needed funds to carry out their work by running bingo games but now they are losing a good part of the income to ALC. Revenues from bingos are usually those which support the Legion buildings. Less revenue here means more money being used from other fundraising ventures for capital expenses, which should be used for veterans.

In closing, might we suggest that some of the profits that ALC is realizing on these bingo games could be shared in some way with the bingo halls. Just to add a little bit to that, since this was written up - I'm a member of Hants County Branch in Windsor, the same as Comrade Porter is - we've had to cancel our Wednesday night bingos. We just weren't getting the crowd, we were losing money. That was a branch that, at times, we used to have four bingos a week. Now we're down to one bingo a week, on Sunday night, and even that one is getting down. Where we used to have crowds of 200-some, now we're getting down to about 110 or 120. I'm sure that there are lots of other bingos - not only Legion but non-charitable organizations - that are in the same boat. That would be the one on those ones.

My last one I have here, actually I touched on it a bit there, this is on credit card use in ATM and ABM machines located in Legions with VLTs. As of March 2009, ATMs and ABMs in Legion branches no longer will be able to accept credit cards and will only accept a debit card. In recent meetings with Mr. Bradley Conrad, Director of Lottery Gaming, it is our understanding that this is being done so that VLT players won't over-extend their credit card. This does not prevent anyone who wants to use their credit card to get money by going to another ABM location - next door, down the street, what's the difference?

It is also easy for one to get an overdraft on a bank account - we all know that - which will let them use their debit card and play on borrowed money.

[9:15 a.m.]

Legion branches that have ATMs and ABMs in their branches receive a commission on all transactions that go through their ATM and ABM machine. They are now losing this revenue on any transactions that used to be made with credit cards. Mr. Conrad could not supply us with any information advising how much credit card money was being used in the VLTs. A good number of our members use the money that they get at ATMs for use other than for using it in VLTs. For instance, I know of a couple of veterans, basically their cheques go to the banks. They don't see their cheques and they don't like carrying large sums of money around, which we all know why. So they'll come in at the end of the month, they may be running a little bit low and they want to come in, sit down, do a little socializing and whatnot. They'll go and they'll use their credit card to get themselves a few dollars. They can no longer do that unless they go down the street and do it, next door and do it, or whatever the case may be.

It is our feeling that this is very unfair to our members. It also cuts back on revenues that Legion branches receive on commission from credit card transactions that they can put to use in the operation of the Legion branch. There, gentlemen, is the end of my three submissions, basically bingo-related.

THE CHAIR: I believe we should continue on with all the presentations and we'll be taking notes as we go and at the end we'll come back to the bingo. So anyway,

whoever is next.

JACK HATCHER: Mr. Chairman, our next presenter will be Comrade Roger Purnell.

ROGER PURNELL: Thank you Comrade, Chairman, and members. This is in reference to the Smoke-free Places Act.

The Province of Nova Scotia implemented the Smoke-free Places Act on December 1, 2006. The Act clearly states, in the Application of the Act, Section 3(2): “Nothing in this Act affects the rights of aboriginal people respecting traditional aboriginal spiritual or cultural practices or ceremonies, 2002, c.12, s.3”

We have Canadians protected by Canadian Statutes who are working and living in areas of this province and who are smoking freely with no obligation to abide by this provincial Statute. As a result, other citizens are constantly subjected to second-hand smoke as part of their daily life. An example of this inequity is the First Nations Reserve and the offices, workplaces of the employees of the federal government. Because of the recognized health hazards associated with smoking or inhaling second-hand smoke, is it not the right of all Nova Scotians to receive equal treatment under the law and to be protected now. If our leaders deem it prudent to protect our health and, in the long run, keep our health costs under control by taking preventive measures now, is it not also prudent to see this Statute as all-inclusive, so that all citizens are protected and that all taxpayers receive equal treatment. Therefore, is it not the right of all Nova Scotians to be protected from any future legal implications resulting from the exclusion of these citizens.

As our Nova Scotian veterans are either employed or living within these areas, we - the Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command of the Royal Canadian Legion - request that:

The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, Province of Nova Scotia, emphatically request our provincial leaders to petition the federal government to ensure the Smoke-free Places Act of Nova Scotia includes all Canadians, whether under federal employment or living on federal lands.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the committee for listening to us again and for allowing us to be present today to represent our veterans. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, and we'll just go on to the next presentation.

JACK HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Our next presenter will be our Provincial Chairman, Comrade Steve Wessel.

STEVE WESSEL: Thank you, Comrade Jack. Mr. Chairman, committee members, good morning. My presentation this morning is with regard to our existing

Veterans Memorial Highway. Approximately nine years ago Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command made a request of the Government of Nova Scotia to recognize our veterans through the renaming of Highway No. 102 and on November 9, 2000, the province officially announced the name change of a portion of Highway No. 102, from Miller Lake to Exit 14, near Truro, to Veterans Memorial Highway.

The highway is presently designated by two large signs, approximately 10 feet by 17 feet, one northbound, at Miller Lake and one southbound, at Exit 14 near Truro. There are two other smaller signs - 2.5 feet by 4 feet - along the route, near Stewiacke and Brookfield. During the unveiling ceremony the province was represented by then Premier John Hamm, who was quoted as saying, "I hope this commemoration serves daily as a reminder of the toil and sacrifice of our veterans and contributes to the lasting memory of those who served our country."

The Minister of Transportation and Public Works at the time, Ron Russell, was also in attendance at the commemoration and said, "It is important that everyone remember the role veterans have played in protecting rights and freedoms for Canadians." This provincial Veterans Affairs Committee was represented at the time at the dedication by the then-committee chairman, MLA Bill Langille.

The significant points raised in the quotes above state that the dedication of the highway should serve as a daily reminder of the sacrifices that have been made and are continuing to be made by our Canadian veterans. To know exactly who I am referring to when I say veteran, I have included a short but poignant description of our military men in Afghanistan and around the world, entitled *½ boy, ½ man*. It is attached as Annex B to this report and I hope you will read it when you have a moment. It was true of our fighting forces years ago and it still holds true today.

In lieu of that, I would, however, like to share just one quote from this article with you. It says, "Just as did your Father, Grandfather and Great-grandfather, he is paying the price for our freedom. He has asked nothing in return, except our friendship and understanding. Remember him, always, for he has earned our respect and admiration with his blood."

We should never lose sight of the fact that our present day veterans are still making this supreme sacrifice, not necessarily in defence of Canada but definitely in defence of the rights of others to enjoy their lives and freedom. Since 2002, 116 of these veterans have been killed in action, 11 of these veterans were from our Province of Nova Scotia, a full 10 per cent. The swell of pride by Canadians all across our country for our military is growing daily, through "Red Friday" celebrations, the support of the Royal Canadian Legion's Troop Morale Fund and the sheer outpouring of emotion shown along the Highway of Heroes in Ontario upon the repatriation of those killed in action in Afghanistan.

We also see the pride our veterans have in themselves, through the ever-growing



number of veterans licence plates that we see on our streets and highways. The veterans licence plate project started here, in this committee room, in November 2001 and to date nearly 10,000 plates have been issued.

The Canadian Forces have great pride in the work they do and appreciate these small symbols of recognition. We, the members of the Royal Canadian Legion, would like to increase the enthusiasm we are showing for our troops and are therefore requesting that the Government of Nova Scotia, through this committee, again take a leading role in support of all veterans by rededicating Veterans Memorial Highway, by making it much more visible to the general public.

As mentioned previously, there are only two large and two small signs along the approximately 95 kilometres of highway between Miller Lake and Exit 14. For anyone entering or exiting the highway between these signs, there is no indication that they are travelling on a dedicated highway. The Royal Canadian Legion is asking for this committee's assistance in rectifying this oversight. We are proposing the addition of approximately 40 new signs at the major exits and entrances, northbound and southbound, between Exits 13A and 5A.

An example of the proposed signage is attached to this report as Annex A and if you would turn to that, I believe it is just the next page. As you can see, the signage could be quite simple and it should include the poppy, which is in red and black, with the words, "Veterans Memorial Highway". It could be as simple as that.

These signs could either be mechanically attached to the existing signposts at the entrances and exits, or it could be an adhesive attached to the already existing signs. We would request that these signs be of a sufficient size so as to be readily noticed by the public, approximately 2.5 feet by 4 feet, which would be the size of the smaller signs en route.

Unfortunately, I do not have an estimate of costs associated with the addition of these new signs but I'm sure that the expense would be minuscule in comparison to the visible recognition garnered for our veterans who continue to bring honour to our province and our country. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Is there another presentation?

JACK HATCHER: Yes, we have one. This next presentation is one that was brought to this committee two years ago, I think it was, or a year and a half ago and we would like to readdress that. Our service officer, Comrade Marc Gauthier, will do that.

MARC GAUTHIER: Thank you very much. This is entitled Veterans Disability Benefits and the focus of our presentation is to discuss veterans' disability benefits, which Community Services define as income and is included by the province when calculating Nova Scotia social housing rental agreements.

On January 10, 2008, the Royal Canadian Legion, Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command, and the Federal Superannuates National Association made a joint presentation to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. This presentation concerned the inclusion of veterans' benefits awarded under the federal Pension Act as income when establishing the rental for provincially subsidized housing applications.

Shortly thereafter, on January 22, 2008, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs wrote to the Honourable Judy Stretch, Minister of Community Services, indicating that it had agreed unanimously to the following motion:

“To recommend to the Minister of Community Services that the Committee recognizes the significant service of this group and agree with them that disability pensions should not be included in determining eligibility for social housing and that the Government of Nova Scotia bring an end to the practice of including disability pension monies as part of a veteran's income when these disabled individuals apply for financially assisted housing programs within our province, and that Nova Scotia should only use the net income of these veterans, as reported on line 236 of the income tax and benefit return.”

In her response the minister indicated, in part that:

“In 2005 the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services examined this issue and affirmed the current HIFE definition of income and policy of continuing to include veteran's disability pensions in the calculation of total household income. This practice is consistent with the practices of other provinces and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Contrary to the assertion of the Federal Superannuates National Association, it is our understanding that no province uses an applicant's income tax return to define their income.”

In our joint presentation, it was clearly stated that at least three provinces - British Columbia, Manitoba and Newfoundland and Labrador - all excluded benefits awarded under the Pension Act as income for the purpose of applications under provincial social programs. This fact was confirmed by staff of the Nova Scotia Department of Seniors, prior to inclusion in the briefing material. It should be noted that all provinces were canvassed and replies obtained in August and September, 2007, thus two years after the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services examined this issue.

Our survey also confirmed that in Ontario this decision is left to the municipality to either include or exclude veterans' benefits awarded under the federal Pension Act. We respectfully request that the standing committee take this into consideration when formulating its future activity on this issue. Both of our organizations were extremely disappointed with the minister's response that the Department of Community Services' practice is consistent with the practices of other provinces, because it is misleading and factually incorrect. It would also appear that the minister's comment that contrary to the

assertion of the Federal Superannuates National Association, it is our understanding that no province uses the applicant's income tax return to define their income is misplaced, as no such assertion was made in our presentation to your committee or in our letter to the minister.

[9:30 a.m.]

The fact remains that with the exception of Ontario, which empowers each of its municipalities to make such consideration, the veteran's income under the Pension Act is neither included when calculating taxable incomes anywhere in Canada nor for consideration when applying for provincial social or housing programs in the provinces cited above.

It would seem to be reasonable to request that the Minister of Community Services be asked to:

- review the facts, especially as they related to the practices in British Columbia, Manitoba, and Newfoundland and Labrador
- reconsider the previously stated position based on having the correct information regarding practices in several other provinces and
- respond positively to the unanimous recommendations of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs and recognize those who have served us and sacrificed so much, with this relatively minor but very meaningful benefit.

It seems inappropriate that someone who has been awarded money for gallantry, or is in receipt of a prisoner of war pension, would have their financial awards exempted, yet those who remain disabled by virtue of their service to this country, and continue to suffer the consequences, receive less consideration. The province may recognize the special circumstances of some veterans but it seems to have decided that pensions awarded for permanent disabilities, including awards for pain and suffering, merit very different treatment when it comes to the definition of income for purposes of calculating the rental charges.

A further incentive to change the current practice in Nova Scotia may be the fact that the financial impact on the government should be minor, as this type of pension ceased to be awarded in 2006 and the number of veterans who receive this type of disability compensation is quickly diminishing as each year passes.

Nova Scotia still has the opportunity to redress this unfortunate situation, regardless of other provinces' prerogative, and we sincerely hope your committee will help to change past practice and respond to this request in a way that more properly

reflects the manner in which we should treat our affected veterans. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. We've got a plateful here to deal with, a big plateful. I guess we'll go back to the bingo issue and if there are any questions - Mr. Porter.

CHUCK PORTER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to all of you for your presentations. I'm just going to start at the beginning with a few questions around the bingo. Dave, you talked about some of the prizes in that cookie jar and I'm not up on bingo. I used to work at the fire department at one time, but I don't understand all this new way of doing things - there are a lot of options, I guess.

You sort of answered in the second part where you said \$15,000, that's the maximum prize for the iBingo. Is that the maximum prize for the cookie jar too? You quote around \$10,000 sometimes there that it gets up to.

DAVID BLANCHARD: Any bingo, whether it be the cookie jar, another house-building jar or anything, can only go to a maximum of \$15,000.

CHUCK PORTER: And then there's 2.5 per cent tax that the Legion pays, the winner takes home the prize.

DAVID BLANCHARD: And the Legion pays the tax.

CHUCK PORTER: Why don't we, as a Legion, take part of the prize? Are we not allowed to do that? Again, I'm not familiar with the rules on it - it all has to go, or it's an incentive for people to play?

JACK HATCHER: No, the Legion, on certain games or any bingo, would be taking a portion of the prize.

CHUCK PORTER: Except the cookie jar.

JACK HATCHER: It's just these particular ones that the individuals pay the money out but the Legion or the organization doesn't take any part of it.

CHUCK PORTER: Right, so is it an incentive - whether it's a Legion or the Lions club and a few others that still host the odd bingo - is it an incentive to bring people to the game, to the hall basically?

JACK HATCHER: Oh, certainly, it's winner take all.

CHUCK PORTER: I understand that, I appreciate that, but the 2.5 per cent, does the winner pay any percentage of tax on that?

JACK HATCHER: No.

CHUCK PORTER: They take home the clear . . .

DAVID BLANCHARD: They take home the complete pot. Now, you asked the question - another part there, too, bingos are like every other thing we have in this day. I'm sure you gentlemen are all quite aware that if there's something the government has been giving to the public for years and years and you automatically want to take it away from them, what happens? You get the uproar.

This is the same uproar that the Legions would get, or any bingo would get, if they stopped paying 100 per cent of the cookie jar and started saying, we're only going to pay 97.5 per cent - you know where I'm coming from there? Historically, it has always been that the cookie jar has been 100 per cent payout to the players.

CHUCK PORTER: What about the balance of the games? I can't remember, from the days that I used to work bingo. So the games that you take a piece of the prize on, do you also pay 2.5 per cent on that?

DAVID BLANCHARD: We pay 2.5 per cent for every red cent that's brought in for a bingo.

CHUCK PORTER: Across the board, everything, okay.

DAVID BLANCHARD: If you have a bingo, counting your cookie jar and the rest of it that takes in - I'm going to say in the vicinity of let's say \$10,000 a night and you pay your prizes out of that, you pay on the \$10,000. You pay on the total.

CHUCK PORTER: I'm just going to jump ahead; I know others will have questions. On the iBingo and Salsa Bingo, neither of which I have any idea of what those represent but you have a good handle on that, you talked about how that's affected our bingo at the Legion obviously, just in Windsor, David. How many nights did we used to host bingo, how many games a week?

DAVID BLANCHARD: At one time, we had four Legion bingos in a week and there was also, within the Legion hall, there was another night that the Lions had, there was another night that the fire department had. Now it's got down to Sunday night Legion bingo, that's it. The rest have all - they lost too much money.

CHUCK PORTER: And I knew that it has dropped off quite a bit, as I've talked to the Lions. I think the Lions club in town has actually now given it up altogether and others are considering it, because obviously the fire department long ago gave it up and it was a big money-maker at times for the fire department, as well.

You talked about the budget for players. Do we have any idea, David, or any of

you, what the - you talked about \$50, David, is that average? I mean you've been at the bingo game, a lot of you probably, for a lot of years. What's the average?

DAVID BLANCHARD: That's a question and you asked a question and I'm going to give you a truthful answer. Our truthful answer is that we average - see, what we do, our bingo manager has the total income on his computer and he has the total number of players we have there and then there's a column over there that says the average spend. Our average spends range from \$55 to \$63 a night.

CHUCK PORTER: Per player.

DAVID BLANCHARD: Well, this is what the average is. Now, there are some that are spending way over that, because I know a lot are spending only \$10, but the average works out to within that - it all depends on what time of the month it is. Around payday it goes up, or if the cookie jar is up or something like that. Once the cookie jar is up . . .

CHUCK PORTER: It draws a bigger crowd.

DAVID BLANCHARD: . . . what it tends to do - it not only draws a bigger crowd but you have to play a game and all your game books, all those game books - if you go bingo on it, the more game books you play, the more chances you have of winning the cookie jar.

If you're playing - let's go back to the old days when bingo was played on a card. Some people played two cards, some people played 15. Well, the person playing 15 cards had a lot better chance of winning the cookie jar than the person did playing the two.

CHUCK PORTER: And with the iBingo and Salsa Bingo, any idea or any data as to how much that spending - you said between \$55 and \$63 on average. I know the number of nights has cut down, obviously, any idea how much that has decreased it?

DAVID BLANCHARD: I don't know really and I think the only place that we would get a number on that, and I doubt if they would give it to us, would be the Gaming Commission, they're the ones that run it - although there must be some place in their reports, I would say, that they would have to show that.

I've heard people at our bingo who have said, well, I can't - like I usually sell the main books when they come in and I can pick them out that, okay, Chuck has been coming all along, well, you want this and you want that. Then somebody says, well, I was on TV this afternoon and I was playing a little bit at home and I'm a little short on cash so I don't want that much, I'm going to cut back on two or three books. I know that is taking place.

CHUCK PORTER: All right, thank you. Junior, do you just want us to keep

going?

THE CHAIR: No, we've got a lot of issues here to deal with and Mr. Paris is next. So I think we've got to cut this time off for this issue within the next 15 minutes or so because we've got three other issues behind this one to deal with. So, Mr. Paris, if you want to go ahead.

PERCY PARIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (Interruption)

THE CHAIR: Yes, we are, we're dealing with the bingo issue right now.

PERCY PARIS: Bingo - thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess my question is, the Atlantic Lottery Corporation - and I can tell from your presentation that you've had some discussions with them - I guess I'm curious as to what their response has been to date.

DAVID BLANCHARD: Okay, what their response has been to date basically on this, Comrade Percy, is that number one, they don't control some of these things, they're controlled by the provincial government. That's why they told us one time to see two of the ministerial departments. Number two, well, this is the way it is, there's not much we can do about it. Those are the answers that we're getting, or it's powers above us that have to make these changes, we can't make them.

ROGER PURNELL: They explained to us that they go to a directors meeting and at that directors meeting, they make a decision and then it's implemented. There is no discussion on how that is going to implement the user, the end user. We go as part, as a user, to talk to these people and sometimes we feel as though we're the guinea pigs and they put these Acts in place, we criticize them and tell them that this is going to affect all non-profit organizations, not just the Legions.

You found out how many of our fire departments are in problems right now. It all boils down to the lack of income from their bingo runs and how much the Gaming Corporation is actually physically putting more and more out there on the bingo, on the Internet and in the halls, et cetera, and in the local bars, that is making it less and less helpful to our organizations.

PERCY PARIS: And you'll have to excuse my ignorance when it comes to bingos and what bars are - the rules that they have in place now, in the last paragraph when you talk about on-line bingo and you talk about the way you can access cash, credit card, debit card, electronic funds. So what you're looking for is for the playing field to be level? Do you want those same options available at the Legion?

ROGER PURNELL: We've got a situation where you, as a member, come into our branch, as Comrade Dave said, and want to use a credit card facility for his own personal use - it has nothing to do with gambling, right? - and that credit card facility now has to be taken out of our branch, and we are a club licence. We are all paid members so

we're all members of a club. We have bylaws, we have a charter, and we've been told that we can't have this facility for our members anymore because it contradicts the use of certain facilities.

You can go on-line with a credit card and spend as much money as you want and there are no restrictions on it, but you can't come into our branch and put a credit card in and get \$20 out.

PERCY PARIS: Okay, I understand that and my question is, are you looking for a level playing field?

ROGER PURNELL: Absolutely.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Paris.

[9:45 a.m.]

DAVID BLANCHARD: I might just add there, Comrade Percy said he wasn't much up on bingo but maybe he didn't listen to his poor old dad, because he was really one of our main bingo organizers at our branch in Windsor. (Laughter)

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that information.

PERCY PARIS: Will that be recorded? (Laughter)

THE CHAIR: Mr. Gaudet.

WAYNE GAUDET: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, there's a pile of stuff here. I'm going to try to focus on this tax grab. I'm trying to understand - let's begin, I think I heard during your presentation that there are less and less bingos and less and less Legions carrying bingos. Just to try to give us sort of a background, how many Legions would actually have bingos around the province?

ROGER PURNELL: Could I answer that. I have a zone on the South Shore with 10 branches. In the last three years, seven of those branches have had to stop bingo because of, one, the availability of being on-line with no ceiling (Interruption) Pardon me?

GORDON GOSSE: High-speed Internet.

ROGER PURNELL: Yes, and secondly, because of the smoking regulations. They can't afford to go and spend \$100 on-line and then come out to your local hall, whether it be a fire department or a Legion. I've lost - seven branches have lost a recognized income. In one branch, that used to be \$30,000 guaranteed and now they can't run it; they haven't got enough members. That \$30,000 paid a heck of a lot of youth organizations,



community involvement, charities. We can't do it anymore because the restriction has been put on us by the government.

WAYNE GAUDET: So if I understand correctly, over the years, Legion bingos had to pay this 2.5 per cent tax grab to the province, right?

ROGER PURNELL: Correct.

WAYNE GAUDET: So your recommendation is that basically we try to get the government to discontinue collecting this 2.5 per cent tax, right?

DAVID BLANCHARD: That would be perfect.

THE CHAIR: Excuse me, is this provincial or federal?

DAVID BLANCHARD: Provincial.

THE CHAIR: Provincial - it goes to the province, okay.

DAVID BLANCHARD: I might just add to what was told here about one zone. Another zone down through the Valley, we've lost the branch in Kentville, the branch in Berwick, the branch in Wolfville - they no longer have bingo, and I think Canning has cut theirs out too. So that's four out of seven branches in that zone.

WAYNE GAUDET: Have there been any discussions with officials within the Department of Finance to discontinue collecting this?

DAVID BLANCHARD: No.

WAYNE GAUDET: So, Mr. Chairman, we should maybe have a motion in this committee for us to pursue the recommendations that are before our committee, to request officials from the Department of Finance to consider discontinuing this 2.5 per cent tax charged on Legion bingos.

THE CHAIR: That's a fair request. Do we have a seconder for that?

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.

DAVID BLANCHARD: I thank you very, very much for that, even though I know this is something you people have to take forward, but I do thank you for the

consideration you are giving us on this.

THE CHAIR: Okay, maybe we could go on to the next issue and that's the Smoke-free Places Act. Do we have any questions?

ROGER PURNELL: The credit card is the next issue, Mr. Chairman - the credit card, the use of the ATMs/ABMs.

THE CHAIR: I got mixed up here, maybe. Okay, yes.

DAVID BLANCHARD: I did reference this in one of the bingo ones but this is a standard one that was on credit card use/ATM machines located in Legions with VLTs. If you don't have VLTs and you're in the building, you can leave your credit card facilities in there.

THE CHAIR: Okay, that's what we'll do. I got them mixed up, I believe that was my fault, excuse me. I was mixing up the smoke with the bingo there, I think.

Okay, the ATM machines, are there any questions on that?

CHUCK PORTER: Thank you. David, I'll just refer to our own Legion again, where I know it best. How many people use the machine? Do we know the data on that at all?

DAVID BLANCHARD: No, I mean it's - the machine that's there at the Legion was actually a heavily used machine because if any of you know it or not, where the Legion is located in Windsor, it's at the Fort Edward Mall and there used to be another ATM in the mall and now there isn't. So if you can't use the one in the Legion, you have to go downtown, down into the older part of town. So we do get - we even get people come in and they just come in basically to use the machine because it is located right at the front door.

CHUCK PORTER: The only other quick question I would have on that is - and there's probably no way of tracking it, but I'm just kind of curious. Do we know, because of taking the ability to use the credit card away from that, how much impact that has had financially on our branch, just as one example?

DAVID BLANCHARD: Maybe Roger has some figures on it.

ROGER PURNELL: Branch 24, Bridgewater, used to make - with both facilities available - a commission of nearly \$3,000 a year, which we used for veterans' events. We've had to change as of April 1<sup>st</sup>. We purchased our own machine this time and we've had to take the facility of the credit card away and so far, just this period of time - I did it before we came out here - we've only made \$75.

The facility has crippled our use. We're not making the money, we won't make the money. This is the busiest part of the year, as you know, in any Legion because in the summer people don't go in. The only people who are using it are those people who need the funds on a debit card. Those people who come in now or used to come in, the veterans who felt secure in their own environment, with their own friends around them, to take out money for their own needs, are now coming in and being very despondent that this facility has been taken away to accommodate the ruling on the VLTs being put into a separate room. They feel that that's a disgrace.

CHUCK PORTER: So the biggest effect there then has been what - the Legion takes a percentage of that machine?

ROGER PURNELL: The Legion takes a percentage of it, regardless of taking a percentage or a commission of that machine. Every time you do a transaction at an ATM, your account gets charged if it's at a separate location to your bank. So if you go to an ATM, you get a certain percentage, depending on the company you have a contract with.

Now some Legions have had to break their contracts, right, and being the financial losers on this, to bring in another contract on another machine that doesn't have this facility. It all bears down to the fact that we have VLTs in our branches and they're taking away a member's rights, right? This has nothing to do with gambling. This is a facility that we provided for our members and our veterans, in particular. Seniors come in there and they use it for the security. We asked for a 12-month grace to discuss this with them and a longer time and they threw it back at us, saying no way.

So I would just say that yes, we're losing money but that's not the main issue here, the main issue is that we're losing the privilege for our members, that is the main issue.

CHUCK PORTER: Thank you, Roger.

DAVID BLANCHARD: I might add to that that in one of our meetings with them, the question was put to why are you doing this? Their answer was, to help cut back on problem gamblers. Okay. You know I went home that night and I turned the television on and I looked at the television and here was a lady standing there dancing with joy, boy, she was going right out of it - oh, I just won \$100,000 and all I had to do was go down and buy a ticket. Yet they're saying that this is in there to cut back on problem gamblers and then when you turn around and see the TV ads, and you've all seen them, it's as easy as pie to win money. So that's a great message to put in front of a problem gambler. That's where it doesn't come together.

ROGER PURNELL: I'd like to just add to that. The first part of the bingo and the exercise that we discussed earlier, you can go on-line with a credit card, no limit. So it doesn't diminish people from gambling, that's a smokescreen. What it's doing is it is taking away a privilege for our members and I feel that as strongly as I am on this

committee, that they are taking away something that they haven't even looked at. So, in my opinion, it is wrong.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Wilson.

DAVID WILSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is the first time I am aware of this. I haven't read anything about it, I never got any notice on this. I've used the ABM at our Legion in Sackville many times. Maybe now I'll save money on Remembrance Day but I mean it was a service, definitely, that was utilized.

Are you aware, when this came into effect, if it came into effect for other establishments, like local lounges?

DAVID BLANCHARD: Everything.

DAVID WILSON (Sackville-Cobequid): So no restaurants, bars, that have VLTs can have a, if that's correct . . . .

DAVID BLANCHARD: It's the VLTs that did it.

ROGER PURNELL: The policy is that they are picking one entity, any licensed premise and we're saying that we're a club, our members pay to be a member of that club but any guests that come in have to be signed in. We have bylaws, we've got a Royal Charter. We shouldn't be tarred with the same brush - with all due respect to the establishments - as the local lounge. We have control over our gambling, we have control over our members. We know them by name. We know those people who are abusing the situation. So in this case, we feel that they must pick and choose and they haven't done that. As far as we are concerned, it's easier for them to paint everybody with the same piece of tar than it is to say hang on a minute, we've got to look at this in a different light.

DAVID WILSON: So before this change came into effect, did you have any input or were you able to have any input on this change? Were you notified six months ago that possible changes were going to happen, what are your opinions, what data do you have to support . . .

ROGER PURNELL: We were notified, we asked for a meeting and that's like trying to catch a runaway dog.

DAVID BLANCHARD: Well actually on the notification, when this first came out, and you talk about the Sackville branch; that's a good example. They had the inspector come into the Sackville branch last year and told Sackville that they had to remove that then, by the end of last year, when it didn't really come into effect until this year. So they removed it.

ROGER PURNELL: And they broke their contract and they got fined for

breaking their contract and that's what we've got right now. We asked for 12 months grace so our Legions could negotiate contracts, that they could fight the situation and they just came back to us recently and said, no way. We feel that it's not right.

It's okay if I was going into a lounge bar and I was just wanting to use the machine and they didn't have credit card facilities, fine. You can still pay by credit card for a restaurant or for food in a bar and you can still ask for extra money on that card because they'll give it to you. So I feel that this is just a waste - taking away a privilege.

DAVID WILSON: That was kind of what I was trying to get at, the lounges and restaurants - can you still use credit cards to purchase food and liquor?

ROGER PURNELL: Yes, but not use it for gambling. You can get the swipe on the desk but you can't go up to the ATM that's in there and get it.

DAVID WILSON: So their members, for restaurants and lounges, if you want to call them members, can still have access to using a credit card and pay for their purchases other than gambling, but a Legion cannot accept a credit card.

[10:00 a.m.]

ROGER PURNELL: No.

DAVID WILSON: Okay.

STEVE WESSEL: The only place you wouldn't be able to use your credit card in a lounge or a restaurant would be at the automatic bank machine. You can use it at the cash but you couldn't use it at the automatic bank machine, that's the only place.

DAVID WILSON: Just so I'm clear on this, you're not allowed - at the Legions you're not allowed to have a credit card machine even behind the bar? Okay, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Are there any other questions on this? Does anybody have a solution? I believe what we could do - I may be out of my way as Chair, but I think we could ask Mr. Conrad to review this, from this committee, for our Legions.

He said they wouldn't meet with you? You requested a meeting?

ROGER PURNELL: When we asked for a meeting, it takes an extended period of time to have the meeting. Nine times out of 10, over the five years that I've been involved in this, it's not always with the same person.

Mr. Brad Conrad has been very helpful with us and has been very supportive. When we do get a meeting, they are being as helpful as they possibly can but he has to report back to his hierarchy. We made a request to them that we wanted a 12-month

extension to discuss this. Just recently they've come back - I think it was just a one-liner on an e-mail - saying no. So regardless of that, our feeling is that we are different to a lounge setting of a bar. We are providing a facility to paid members of a recognized, chartered club and we are conscious of those members by name, as you can tell from around this table. We know their habits and if there's nobody better geared up to look after excessive gambling, misuse of funds, than us, then I don't know who is. We're losing out because we're being tarred with the same brush.

We're asking you, as a committee, to approach the Nova Scotia Gaming Corporation to exclude the Legion halls from this but they have to realize that there are two entities out there and it may be that they have to look at providing a separate licence for the Legions because we are suffering under this total umbrella of the rules that are being pushed out there and we will no longer be able to raise the funds that we have. It's important to us.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Paris.

PERCY PARIS: I guess I understand the "ask" and I've got a question - is that the best strategy to go about getting where you want to go? If we write a letter, as this committee, to the same individual that you've got the "no" from, the response is simply going to be that well, we've looked at that and we've responded and the response was no.

You've mentioned that part of the response that you have gotten was from someone higher. So I'm throwing this out, would it not be in everyone's best interests, if I've got a case, the best person to present that case is me, myself, I'm the one with the passion, I'm the one who knows all the statistics about it. So I guess my question is, is it better for you, as a committee, to meet with maybe not the minister responsible but certainly maybe with the deputy minister, and maybe we should be looking at a letter to the deputy responsible, requesting an audience with this committee, where they could present, and our letter would be very supportive of their cause. That's where I'm coming from because my fear is that if we write a letter about the response, then the response that we're going to get back is oh yes, we responded to that, the answer is no, based on da, da, da.

DAVID BLANCHARD: I might also add to that, Comrade Percy, that Mr. Conrad knows - I think at the last meeting we had we told him that we would be bringing the subject up at this meeting, so he knows that we're not satisfied with what he told us.

PERCY PARIS: Which I think probably reinforces my own mindset that maybe you've got to go above the source or the contact that you have now.

DAVID BLANCHARD: We have no problem with that, we can prepare a . . .

STEVE WESSEL: With the backing of this committee.

DAVID BLANCHARD: With the backing of this committee, yes.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Gaudet.

WAYNE GAUDET: Mr. Chairman, I think everyone acknowledges that Legions, not just in Nova Scotia but across Canada, they have their own constitution, they have their own charter, there is federal legislation in place that basically recognizes these Legions across our country. They can't be thrown in with restaurants, lounges - they have their own separate identity. For us, I think basically would be to request to the minister responsible for gaming in this province, an exemption on their behalf, with ATM machines. That's how I see it.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Porter.

CHUCK PORTER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I agree with Mr. Gaudet. They are a different entity. I know the branch I am from is celebrating 90 years of history this very year and they are quite different in their nature, what they do and what they represent specifically and I would be more than willing to move a motion to that effect. That we do try and set up Legion representation, at least with a meeting, and/or that exemption, whatever the committee would see reasonable, with that minister responsible for the gaming authority in this province, to have the Legion exempted. So I would agree with that 100 per cent.

THE CHAIR: Is there a motion?

WAYNE GAUDET: Let's make a motion that this committee call upon the minister responsible for gaming in our province to exempt the Legions from this policy.

CHUCK PORTER: I second the motion.

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

The motion is carried.

DAVID BLANCHARD: Thank you. I might just say, too, that if anybody needs it or if there is any backup, we've a little book over there which has the Act to Incorporate, which was the Act that was passed in the Canadian Parliament forming the Royal Canadian Legion and everything that's about it, what we can do and who we can represent and everything is there. It's very easy to get that information. We can send it over.

WAYNE GAUDET: Mr. Chairman, maybe we should have that information when we do formulate our request to the minister.

DAVID BLANCHARD: We've got one here, I think.

WAYNE GAUDET: Wonderful, very well, thank you.

DAVID BLANCHARD: That's what it is to bring your chairman with you.

THE CHAIR: Well we're moving right along here. We're not hard to get along with here; you've just got to find the answers. Mr. Paris.

PERCY PARIS: If I may, before we move on to the next, I've got to say, and this is only a suggestion, even though we are going to write a letter on your behalf, I think it might be prudent on your part to also write a letter to the minister, indicating your willingness to meet with the minister or the deputy over this particular issue.

DAVID BLANCHARD: Who is the minister?

CHUCK PORTER: Minister Mark Parent.

THE CHAIR: Okay, moving right along here, the Smoke-free Places Act was the next one, wasn't it?

DAVID BLANCHARD: Could I just clarify one little thing on this part? This has been brought up before. We've been told that it's the federal government's jurisdiction. There has been a case heard by the Manitoba . . .

JACK HATCHER: It's Alberta, I think it's Alberta.

DAVID BLANCHARD: . . . by the Alberta or Manitoba Supreme Court and said it's provincial. It's just been a hot ball. We came to the provincial government here and they told us federal. We went to the federal and nobody wants to touch it. It's a hot potato.

ROGER PURNELL: Especially with the press that you've had recently in the ChronicleHerald doing a major writeup on illegal smokes.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Paris.

PERCY PARIS: And that was going to be my first question, was around responsibility. My question was going to be, had you talked to anybody at the federal level, and I'm sure if you did, then they might have said come back and talk to the provincial people. So I think, as a committee, that we need clarification with respect to responsibility here. I don't think it's wise on our part to begin chasing our tail here. I think we want to be clear about responsibility.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Porter.



CHUCK PORTER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I'll only say this on this Smoke-free Places Act. I'm not a smoker and never have been. I worked too many years in health care to see the downside and the hazards that come from smoking. What is good for one is good for all, in my opinion. I don't care whose jurisdiction it is, to be perfectly honest with anyone, if there's no smoking, there's no smoking.

I know that smokers, some agree. They know the habit, they know how bad it is, they know how bad it is for their health but we also realize it's an illness, some would call it and refer to it as. At the same time, if we're going to put a law in this province then it is the same across the province and I don't particularly care where we're at' it makes no difference to me whatsoever. Maybe that's my bias and my background and my never being a smoker a bit, too, but I have no problem expressing my opinion on that and I'll certainly not back away from it. Clarity is certainly a valid reason that maybe we do need it but anyway, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Gosse.

GORDON GOSSE: Well, thank you. I'm just looking at this and saying, I wonder, as a committee, if we write letters or ask things if we shouldn't send a letter to the province, asking them to clarify what Act this falls under because you have different provinces with different Acts. I know that when it comes to dealing with Aboriginal Affairs and stuff like that, that they normally would answer only to the Crown, which is the feds, so we need some clarification on this Act to find out where this Act falls. I think we should send a letter, as a committee, to ask for clarification and which jurisdiction and which Act this falls under.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Porter.

CHUCK PORTER: I think Health Promotion and Protection was initially who put this Act before, wasn't it Barry (Interruption) it was, yes, who would now be Minister Dunn? No?

WAYNE GAUDET: Mr. Chairman, I think that letter should probably be directed to the minister in Nova Scotia responsible for Aboriginal Affairs, looking for clarifications. Once clarification has been provided to our committee, then we can pursue this matter to the next level. But again, chasing our tail, I truly don't know - I think basically we're on a fact-finding mission here. We need to try to get some direction provided to us in order to pursue our next step.

THE CHAIR: So there's . . .

ROGER PURNELL: There are just a couple of things. It's not just the Aboriginal Affairs people who we're looking at. We're also looking at the federal government employees, our own Armed Forces, our own VAC departments, all of these are covered

by federal law and not provincial law.

Now I've been approached by our reserves, as well as federal-employed persons and they are in support of what we're doing. So I don't want you to go, gentlemen, to the point that it's just our Aboriginal Affairs that we're after. We're looking that all of Nova Scotia should be smoke free, end of story. If it affects our government forces or our government employees or our Native reserves, then that's exactly what we should be doing.

It's not just for one, it's for all. I think that, yes, by all means find out which jurisdiction and which Act it is under but you know it's not just one package here, there's a complete package.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Purnell, but I feel that the province is going to come back and say that it's under federal jurisdiction, the reserves in this province belong to the federal government and are a federal responsibility; I've heard that before. So maybe we have to get it clarified from both levels of government, provincial and federal - both Aboriginal Affairs, federally and provincially. Maybe the letter should go to both, just a suggestion.

CHUCK PORTER: It wouldn't hurt to get the replies from both.

THE CHAIR: From both.

CHUCK PORTER: It's a starting point for us and we can take it forward as we move ahead.

THE CHAIR: So, do we have a motion for that?

CHUCK PORTER: But again, all I would say to that, following on Mr. Purnell's comments - it's not one group. We're talking about a people across the province, wherever the Smoke Free Act falls into place. It's not just about Aboriginals, it's not just about our reserves. That's the problem with it, I think, Wayne, it encompasses everybody and we're trying to focus on a group but maybe really it isn't. What they're asking for in the motion is basically to support the fact that it's across the board - what's good for one is good for all. That's how I'm reading your motion, just for correction.

[10:15 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: Mr. Purnell.

ROGER PURNELL: Yes, the most important thing here is the health of all Nova Scotians, the health of people who live here. We, as taxpayers, pay for the health of every single person in this province. So I see no jurisdiction here, other than the fact that if you live in Nova Scotia and you work in Nova Scotia, you're Nova Scotian. So I don't

differentiate and that's what it was aimed at - all for one, one for all.

THE CHAIR: So, do we have a motion to go to both levels of government, to get this clarified both federal and provincial? Mr. Wilson.

DAVID WILSON: I mean if you look at what they ask, the request really is, in my mind - I think, if you would agree - that they want us to send a letter off to the federal government, the federal government as a whole I would use, to say in Nova Scotia we have a Smoke-free Places Act, why do we have some areas, under federal jurisdiction, with the ability for them to smoke.

So I would think it's a request to the federal government, on behalf of this committee, to ask why the federal areas, lands and employment areas, do not fall or are exempt from our Smoke-free Places Act here in Nova Scotia. That way they can come back and say well, Aboriginals fall under this and government employees fall under this one, then we've got to target a little more or target a little better.

THE CHAIR: Do we have a motion on the floor now? Do we have a seconder? Mr. Paris.

PERCY PARIS: I second it.

THE CHAIR: All agree?

WAYNE GAUDET: The motion is we're sending a letter to the federal government supporting our Smoke-free Places Act in Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: But it needs to be cc'd to our provincial Aboriginal Affairs, too, agreed?

WAYNE GAUDET: The provincial government, what body?

DAVID WILSON: Because we're not trying to identify or target one specific area, we're targeting the federal government because if it's under their jurisdiction, they should be required to follow the Acts that we have in our own province. So I think just to the federal government, cc'd to the Premier, I guess the Premier's Office, saying that this committee supports the Smoke-free Places Act here in Nova Scotia and that the federal government should be required to follow that Act.

WAYNE GAUDET: One clarification, to who at the federal level? Who are we sending our letter to? Not the Prime Minister's Office.

CHUCK PORTER: The Legion is bringing it forward - why don't we send it to Veterans Affairs Canada, to support and they can move it in the direction that they need to move it forward federally, on our behalf, from our local branch. Could we not go there? It

seems to make sense.

ROGER PURNELL: Comrade Chair, may I make a suggestion that you cc the Minister of Health.

THE CHAIR: Okay, we have a motion and we have a seconder and I hope it's clear.

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

The motion is carried

THE CHAIR: Okay, moving right along, on the highway, the Veterans Memorial Highway. Any questions on that? Mr. Wilson.

DAVID WILSON: Just a quick question. Similar to what Mr. Paris asked earlier, have you made a formal request to government to put these signs up? I think that would be a great first step. I can't see how the government would ignore this request, so I'm just wondering if you have done that and if not, would you do that because I think this issue is not a - it won't be an issue around how much money will it cost to put 40 signs up. It's just a matter of getting that request, that official request from the Legion Command, requesting that we put these smaller signs up.

So have you done it? If not, will you do it in the near future? You might be surprised, I think, by an answer.

STEVE WESSEL: We haven't at this particular time. It's similar to the start of the Veterans Memorial Highway, the licence plate project, additional signage that we had put up around the entrances with regard to the veterans' licence plate. We always approached this committee first and came here first, before we went over your head or around you to get to a different department. We felt that everything should go through this department first because it deals with veterans.

So no, we haven't made official notification to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal yet. I believe when I did the presentation in 2001 for the veterans' licence plate, there were representatives here from the Department of Transportation and Public Works and they said at that time that they would accept any recommendations that this committee would make on our behalf. That's the route we took at that time and everything just flew through smoothly.

DAVID BLANCHARD: I might add on that to this committee, as Comrade Steve mentioned there about the veterans' licence plate, just for information, every province in Canada?

STEVE WESSEL: Every province in Canada has followed our lead from the year

2001, and one territory as well, they all have veterans' licence plates.

DAVID BLANCHARD: It started here.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Paris.

PERCY PARIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess my question is another quick snapper. When you say that 40 signs at all entrances and exits north - and southbound, are you referring to - like I can see signs on an entrance onto a highway designating it as a veterans highway and I'm just curious, are you also saying that you want a sign at the exit off the highway as well?

STEVE WESSEL: As a group, we're recommending that the more representation we can have for our veterans, the better. If it's a reminder that you're getting onto a highway and you just happen to be glancing down and you look at your speedometer or whatever, or you glance over your left shoulder because you're merging into traffic and you've missed that sign, so you're going to travel for one exit to get off at the next exit. You missed it when you got on so you're going to get it when you get off. One or the other, you're going to be noticeable of the fact that you are on Veterans Memorial Highway.

Right now, as I said, in between that 95-kilometre stretch there are two small signs, one on either side of the road, that indicate you're on a dedicated highway.

PERCY PARIS: I would like to think, for safety reasons, and I don't know too many on-ramps, I don't know any on-ramps that would have signage on it. I think the purpose of the on-ramp is to not distract a motorist, so I don't think a motorist is looking for signs on the ramp itself.

I think the best place for a sign is after, once I've merged into the traffic and once I've merged safely and then signage.

JACK HATCHER: I would not argue with that at all, Mr. Paris. It could be either after you've merged into traffic or even before you're actually got onto the highway because there's always a sign that says you're taking a right hand turn to get onto Highway No. 102 to head towards Halifax or towards Truro or whatever, and it could be right there, on that sign. Whether it is before or after, all I'm saying is it should be at every entrance and every exit, every major intersection along the route.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Porter.

CHUCK PORTER: Thank you. Just a couple of things, one with regard to signs and Mr. Paris has touched on it. There are a number of regulations around all of the signage but I'm sure that the department would be more than happy to work appropriately to place those signs, if given the go-ahead to put them up, that they would be done in a

manner that would be most appropriate for the Legion.

The other, I would be more than prepared to move a motion that we support the request to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal and/or the Minister responsible for Military Relations; sometimes there's funding in there as well, I'm not sure where it may come from.

It may not sound like a lot of money, I've no idea what the cost is. I know you've said in here you haven't costed it out but whether it was able to be done all at one time or not, over the course of a couple of budget years, I don't know. I wouldn't think it would be a great deal of money but again, I would be more than happy to move a motion supporting that we write a letter on behalf of the NS/NU Command, requesting the Department of Transportation to look at this request and consider it for placing signage.

THE CHAIR: Just hang onto that for a minute.

WAYNE GAUDET: I think part of the motion should basically be focused in two areas: (1) that we're calling upon the Minister of Transportation to increase the number of signs on our Veterans Memorial Highway and (2) to call upon the experts here to work with the department to basically determine the appropriate number of signs needed.

Now, I'm not an engineer, I don't know if 30 or 40 signs can be placed or not placed, so I think part of the motion should basically call upon the minister to increase the number of signs on the highway and, at the same time, call upon our guests to work with the department to determine the appropriate number of signs needed.

STEVE WESSEL: Mr. Chairman, may I add to that. Thank you very much for that, Mr. Gaudet, because that's exactly the part of the motion that was made with regard to our licence plate, in fact, that the Department of Transportation and Public Works work hand in hand with the Royal Canadian Legion with regard to design, et cetera. So I appreciate the addition to that, thank you.

DAVID BLANCHARD: I might say just while we're talking about signage, Comrade Marc, we had the picture the other day about the addition they put on the Veterans Memorial Highway signs from here and Truro.

MARC GAUTHIER: Yes, it dealt with the Last Post Fund, it was now 100 years in existence in 2009. So they've added to our signs, smaller signs at the bottom acknowledging the Last Post Fund. It doesn't acknowledge 100 years of existence but it does acknowledge the Last Post Fund.

DAVID BLANCHARD: We would like to thank the provincial government for doing this.

PERCY PARIS: You're welcome. (Laughter)

DAVID BLANCHARD: Well, pass it on.

STEVE WESSEL: Actually that sign is in place of - Democracy 250 also requested that they place their signage on those large Veterans Memorial Highway signs, because of our co-operation with Democracy 250 when it was in existence.

THE CHAIR: So back to our motion. The motion was first by Mr. Porter and amended by Mr. Gaudet. Can we have that motion now put on the floor?

WAYNE GAUDET: Did you want the motion to be read?

THE CHAIR: I would say it should be read.

CHUCK PORTER: Have you got it there, Madam Clerk?

KIM LEADLEY: Not all of it . . .

CHUCK PORTER: I think Wayne covered it well there.

WAYNE GAUDET: We're calling upon the Minister of Transportation and Public Works - or what's the formal name there? Transportation and . . .

THE CHAIR: Infrastructure Renewal.

WAYNE GAUDET: Infrastructure Renewal - who could remember all that - and cc the Minister responsible for Military Relations. So the motion should read, Mr. Chairman, we're calling upon the minister to increase the number of signs on our Veterans Memorial Highway and we're calling upon the minister to consult with our guests to further determine the appropriate number of signs needed along that highway.

THE CHAIR: So we have a motion, is there a seconder?

CHUCK PORTER: I'll second it. If you want to have him as a mover, I'll second it, that's fine.

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

The motion is carried.

Okay, last but not least, veterans' disability benefits.

GORDON GOSSE: He's just getting his paperwork in order.

THE CHAIR: I'm trying to keep track of all this. Mr. Gosse.

GORDON GOSSE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. From your presentation this morning, I take it very clearly that what you're saying is you weren't happy with the response from the Minister of Community Services on our housing issue. I saw some of the very strong words in there: disappointed, misleading and not correct, I guess is what I could say in the sense of that.

[10:30 a.m.]

So what you're telling the committee then, if someone is on a DVA pension, whether it's disabled or just on a veteran's pension, that income is included in the household income limits in their application for housing. So when a veteran applies for housing, their income from that pension is included as their total income.

MARC GAUTHIER: That is correct.

GORDON GOSSE: Yet the federal government of this country doesn't include that as tax.

MARC GAUTHIER: That is correct.

GORDON GOSSE: It's not taxable. So here we have a province that has an income that's not taxable, putting it on housing. That seems to be a problem here in this province because it has happened with all kinds of issues, like this province also includes the child tax credit in the person's income.

I know a lady who lives in my riding and has 10 children, doesn't have any income or anything else but the child tax credit she receives puts her over the limit for housing. Do you know what I mean?

So what you're saying is that because the federal government - this is tax-free and it's not included as income, that they should exclude it from a person who's a veteran applying to get into public housing?

MARC GAUTHIER: That is correct, sir, yes. It's not exactly as income, it's more for pain and suffering. So if someone got hurt while they were in the service, it's a service-related disability so it is a pension. It's a small pension but again, Veterans Affairs doesn't call it income. So for someone who has been in the forces for a number of years, let's say, and obtained a certain salary, which is hopefully comfortable, then because of an injury they are medically terminated, they are medically released, so that's it, they're out of a job.

So they turn over to Veterans Affairs, which is basically their workers' compensation, if you wish, and they submit for a pension, an application for a disability



pension for whatever condition it may be, and Veterans Affairs says yes, here's \$200, \$300 a month tax-free. Now, you lost your job, which is maybe fetching at the time \$40,000, \$50,000 or \$60,000 a year but now you'll be getting \$300 a month.

Of course the veteran says, \$300 a month, that's a far cry from my - I just lost my job, I just lost a good income, a good job here, because of a - whether it's a bum knee or a bad back or whatever it may be. Of course then Veterans Affairs says no, no, hold it, this is not income, this is not an income replacement. This is just for a bit of pain and suffering that you incurred, that you suffered. This is to help you cope with the pain every day, we'll pay for all benefits in addition to that but this is just for you, just to hopefully ease the pain a bit.

So it is not an income replacement, it's just a thank you very much. Now, the provincial government says okay, now we've got to tax that. So on one hand, on one level, the federal government says okay, it's for pain and suffering, non-taxable, it is not an income. But the provincial government says no, no, it is income. Well, which one is it? It's just not fair.

Now, as our presentation stated, if I may - since April 1, 2006, they've done away with that so there are no more monthly pensions paid out; now it's an award. So for someone who gets injured, gets hurt, Veterans Affairs says okay, here's a lump sum of money and be on your way. All of the medical benefits associated would be paid for - if you have a bad back, well, we'll pay for your braces and painkillers for as long as you live. But as far as for your pain and suffering, it is not income, it's just an award so here it is. It's not taxable and that is not included in this rent-geared-to-income. So it's not fair to those who are getting the pension as compared to those who are now getting an award.

An analogy - if you were involved in a car accident yourself and you sued the person behind you and the insurance awards you \$2,500 for soft tissue injury, or \$10,000 if it was more serious, and you happen to be on a pension or you're applying for social housing, well, you wouldn't be declaring that, that wouldn't be required. That's it, that's yours for your pain and suffering. It's not an income.

So now it's the same, it's just not fair for our older veterans. Many of them are on a fixed income and depend on that money to make ends meet and now it has been taxed by the provincial government.

GORDON GOSSE: So would you have any examples of a veteran who was receiving this, who was getting Old Age or Canada Pension and receiving this, who was excluded from public housing, who was not allowed to go into public housing because their income was too high because of this? Would there be examples of that happening across the province where with this income that's coming in, this pension that's coming in, plus their Canada Pension or Old Age, that they were excluded from public housing? There is a limit in public housing where they cut off people because their income is too high. Is that part of the problem also?

MARC GAUTHIER: I'm not specifically aware of any specific issue but I'm sure there are some out there that this ceiling or this additional income, as termed by the provincial government, puts them over the maximum and, therefore, they're not included even to apply.

DAVID BLANCHARD: We do have correspondence from an individual - and actually this is where the superannuates got theirs from - of this happening. Yes, he was turned down because he was a few dollars over the limit but to put him that few dollars over the limit it was taking - his medical pension was added onto his income and that's what put him over the bar.

GORDON GOSSE: Right, and I'm familiar with that. If a veteran has hearing loss and he gets a monthly income for his hearing loss, or received a one-time settlement, and say he gets \$313.50 a month, or whatever, or \$280 for that hearing loss, that income is calculated for him for public housing in the Province of Nova Scotia.

MARC GAUTHIER: Yes, Veterans Affairs, the disability pensions vary from roughly \$150 a month to, let's say, \$1,200. So if you're only getting \$200, well, that may not put you over the maximum but if you're making \$500, that may well put you over the maximum because it's included as an income. So yes, there are circumstances where our veterans, because of that income, hearing loss or whatever it may be, puts them over this threshold, yes, absolutely, and they end up being losers on that.

DAVID BLANCHARD: I might also add on that, even in our comments there, we had researched this prior to when we brought this to this committee before and then when their answer came back, they were using documentation from 2005, which we researched it two years later. Now, maybe those provinces weren't doing it in 2005, I don't know. That was the part that kind of stung us a bit. They basically said hey, this isn't true. We did research it and Marc talked to provincial people, from B.C. right across.

MARC GAUTHIER: So the minister at the time based her decision on studies that had been done in 2005, while we had done ours in 2007. But regardless of that, even if no provinces were in on it, we could have been the first one. We could have been the first, we had been first on many other programs and issues so we could have been the first there, but we weren't. British Columbia, Manitoba, and Newfoundland and Labrador already exempt this disability pension, they don't consider it as income. Ontario, as we said, it's left to the municipalities to determine whether it's to be included or not. That's up to the municipalities so, of course, we don't have a breakdown of that.

This province, of course the precedent wouldn't be created, it's happening elsewhere, but according to the minister, she solely based her decision partly on the fact that no other provinces were doing it - well, there were some, three doing it anyway - and that we don't want to be the first. Well, we could have been the first.

GORDON GOSSE: So what you're saying to the committee today is that you're looking for the minister to have the correct information that's out there to this present day - well, now the new minister, actually - to base their decision on the information that's available today, not a previous report that was available in 2005.

MARC GAUTHIER: You're right, regardless of that, regardless of their findings, we would still want to make sure that this disability pension is not included as an income for any veterans applying for rent-geared-to-income, regardless of the findings.

DAVID BLANCHARD: And whether we follow the other provinces or whether we break new ground, so be it.

GORDON GOSSE: Thank you.

JACK HATCHER: Yes, Mr. Chairman, I think it's important to note - Comrade Marc can correct me if I'm wrong - but this does not affect the modern-day or the nowadays veterans. This is only for the veterans prior to . . .

MARC GAUTHIER: Again, yes, you're correct, as this presentation says, since April 1, 2006.

GORDON GOSSE: The New Veterans Charter.

MARC GAUTHIER: Under the New Veterans Charter, that's right, yes.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Wilson.

DAVID WILSON: Yes, and that was kind of one of the questions I wanted to ask. I know that the changes came about, so do you have a rough number of how many veterans would be receiving those benefits in the province? Do you have that at hand? I think the most information we have, especially where I think the numbers are low and, of course, they're getting lower every year because those veterans are getting older, so do you have those numbers is my first question?

MARC GAUTHIER: We're not privy to that kind of information. I inquired of Veterans Affairs Canada and we're not privy to that kind of information.

DAVID WILSON: And the other thing, most veterans that I know of in my area live in seniors' housing so are those pensions that they receive, or that benefit that they receive, is that calculated into their income? It's a percentage of what they pay to live in seniors' housing so if I'm correct, or if I understand, does that benefit that they have go into calculating the 35 per cent, or whatever, the seniors who live in seniors' housing?

MARC GAUTHIER: That's right, because of this disability pension paid monthly to our veterans, to anyone who has applied for a pension prior to April 1, 2006, that is

correct. We're concerned with all veterans but the majority of these applicants are older veterans, fixed income.

DAVID WILSON: I think the important thing is to recognize that it affects those who might want to apply for public housing, those who live in seniors' housing, those who might have their own housing, who are applying for grants for retrofitting or renovations, emergency repairs, so I just wanted to make sure of that. So do you want to do a motion?

GORDON GOSSE: Go ahead, David.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Porter first, just hang on.

DAVID WILSON: No, go ahead.

CHUCK PORTER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My question was sort of around the numbers too. Do we know what the impact is? At the end of the day do we know what kind of money we're talking about here, by way of - we need to know, obviously, the number of veterans, as you suggested maybe, Comrade Marc, with regard to - is it 200, is it 500? What you're taking, I think it's around 30 per cent for seniors' housing in the province.

I mean when you're looking at an individual, the number could be relatively small, but I was just kind of curious about the math there.

MARC GAUTHIER: That information would be better provided by the department of social housing, because on the application form they have to indicate, of course, if they're veterans or not and if they're getting any pension. But again, we weren't made privy to that kind of information.

CHUCK PORTER: That would be good information obviously to know.

MARC GAUTHIER: We would trust that the number is small but whether it be one or 1,000, it's still not fair. It's got to be fair to everyone.

CHUCK PORTER: Certainly the number, as has been suggested . . .

MARC GAUTHIER: It's dwindling.

CHUCK PORTER: . . . of veterans is dwindling, not by the year but by the month, I think. Folks around our own area and our own branch and reading the columns every day and so on, so it's something that needs to be addressed, there's no question.

I know from my constituency I've written multiple letters, whether it be about federal clawbacks, or whatever it may be, in support of our veterans and we'll be happy

to support you somehow in this one as well.

MARC GAUTHIER: You're absolutely right, this is a question of fairness. Some veterans would have gone to war - whether it be World War II, Korea - have sacrificed their health and then, of course, the government appreciates that as a recognition only through Remembrance Day, medals issued, but for having sacrificed a lot of their health, then say, here's a small pension, we're not going to tax that; we recognize that you did hurt yourself on behalf of your country, so here it is. But then the provincial government, our government, says, sorry, we're going to tax that, in the way that we're going to include that as income.

Now, it's not income, I'm told, it's for pain and suffering. No, we're going to include that. That's not fair, it's just not fair.

CHUCK PORTER: Thank you very much for being here.

[10:45 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Porter. Any other questions? Mr. Wilson.

DAVID WILSON: I'd like to make a motion that we again write the Minister of Community Services requesting that he look at this issue and the recommendations from the Legion Command, ensuring that with his response that he has the most up-to-date information on the other provinces that have exemptions and that we would support the exemption of these funds being calculated into their household income, for the purpose of social housing upgrade grants.

THE CHAIR: Okay. We have a motion on the floor. Any seconders?

GORDON GOSSE: I'll second that, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIR: We have a seconder, Mr. Gosse.

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

The motion is carried.

GORDON GOSSE: I'd like to thank the clerk.

THE CHAIR: Yes, we're going to have the clerk very busy writing letters here.

If there are no other questions, I would like to thank you for coming today and I'll give you some time to close with any closing comments you like, so you have a few minutes if you need them.

DAVID BLANCHARD: I'd just like to, on behalf of Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command, thank you very much for the time that you had to listen to our problems and I feel quite sure that this committee here will do the maximum that it can do. We are quite aware that you people don't make the rules but as long as we know, we feel sure now that you are on our side and you're looking at it from our perspective.

A little more to that, in this great province of ours, our Command here is one of the few fortunate Commands within Dominion Command that has this opening to sit down with a committee; other provinces haven't got it. I've talked to them about it - oh, I wish we could do that - but this is something that we have in this province. As I say, we are grateful for it and it's a good outlet that we can sit down and bring these problems to you - basically some of you may know about it but the majority don't. We can bring them to you from the Legions' perspective.

I know all these problems here this morning, in one way they were not directed to veterans but, in the long way around, yes, they're all directed to veterans, whether they be the taxes that we pay, or whether they be on the machines, or whatever the case may be, it all filters down to the same thing - our branches, in order to do the support work that they did in the past and will continue to do, need these big bucks. We all know that awful lot of the assistance that was available five, 10, 15, 20 years ago is no longer there and it has been organizations like the Royal Canadian Legion that have stepped up to the plate and taken over as much as they can. They can only do so much.

Once again, on behalf of our committee here, I want to thank you for our meeting here this morning. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Blanchard. On behalf of this committee I want to thank you very much. We're here to do anything we can for our veterans and like you said, Mr. Blanchard, we're lucky to have that in this province. One thing we have to do, after we've seen what veterans have gone through and are still going through, we have to try our best, as people here, to take care of our veterans. So we're here to listen to you, your concerns and support you in any way we can, as long as it's good for the people, good for the veterans, it's good for all the province, so thank you very, very much.

DAVID BLANCHARD: May I add just one little thing. On Comrade Steve's presentation, Annex 'B', "½ boy ½ man", please read it. It's something to think about and we see it every day.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. (Interruption)  
A little bit of business, yes. We'll recess for a few minutes.

[10:49 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[10:53 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: I call this meeting back to order, please. We've got five minutes and we have to be out of here, Gordie.

Has everybody had a chance to read this letter from . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

THE CHAIR: So are there any comments on it? I believe we know what Jim is asking there. I guess he's asking us for support, which I believe the day they were in here presenting, we said we would support them in any way we could or thought we could. I'll just give you a minute to read it again.

CHUCK PORTER: He's not speaking to any specific part there, though, is he, really? He doesn't come right out and ask.

THE CHAIR: We're having Veterans Affairs Canada come in. Maybe this letter can be brought up during that meeting and let Veterans Affairs look at this and today we won't have to make any decision because he's not really asking anything specific. I wish he would have put it in more detail. But Veterans Affairs - what we can do, though, we can contact Mr. Davis and we can ask him to clarify maybe a little bit more and that Veterans Affairs Canada is coming into committee and we could present this letter, with being more specific to Veterans Affairs that day. All agreed on that? Mr. Wilson.

DAVID WILSON: Yes, I think he is generalizing here, saying that improvements to the Act could be made. So when are we meeting with - next month, yes.

THE CHAIR: May 14<sup>th</sup>.

DAVID WILSON: So if you maybe send another letter to Mr. Davis - I know we have a few - saying that we are meeting with them and we're more than happy to bring this forward but are there specific examples of what changes are needed from his group of individuals who are supporting families and stuff like that, if that's okay.

THE CHAIR: Okay, is that all agreed on?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Next meeting while the House is in. Now we're saying May - Mr. Gaudet.

WAYNE GAUDET: Mr. Chairman, the practice has been, on numerous committees that I've sat on over the years, while the House is in session the committee does not meet unless an emergency comes up and then the committee is called back to order. So I would suggest that this committee not meet while the House is in session, starting on April 30<sup>th</sup>, and as soon as the House rises, or whatever may happen, that we

either call another meeting or the chairman has his call, that's what I would suggest.

THE CHAIR: All agreed on that?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIR: That is what we agreed on last year, I believe, the same thing. So we'll just get this letter off to Jim Davis and if the House is in on May 14<sup>th</sup>, that meeting may not happen with Veterans Affairs, but we will get it scheduled as soon as possible because Veterans Affairs Canada will be next on the list, right? Okay, thank you.

CHUCK PORTER: I was just going to say, well, perhaps we should just say we'll be meeting with Veterans Affairs Canada in the near future, without putting a specific date and then you don't have to explain all this other stuff, wherever that may fall - June, September, July.

THE CHAIR: Right on, okay, thank you.

WAYNE GAUDET: Motion to adjourn.

THE CHAIR: The committee is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:59 a.m.]