

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**Thursday, November 26, 2009**

**Committee Room 1**

**Nova Scotia/Nuvavut Command**

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## **VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

Clarrie MacKinnon (Chair)  
Gary Burrill  
Trevor Zinck  
Michele Raymond  
Sidney Prest  
Hon. Wayne Gaudet  
Harold Theriault  
Hon. Murray Scott  
Hon. Richard Hurlburt

[Michele Raymond was replaced by Becky Kent.]

### In Attendance:

Kim Leadley  
Legislative Committee Clerk

### WITNESSES

#### Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command

Mr. Les Nash  
Command President

David Blanchard  
Immediate Past President

Jack Hatcher  
Command Treasurer

Steve Wessel  
Command Chairman

Marc Gauthier  
Command Service Officer



House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

**HALIFAX, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2009**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**9:00 A.M.**

CHAIR  
Clarrie MacKinnon

THE CHAIR: I'd like to bring the meeting to order. We are missing a few members, but I think they'll be along shortly. The first item I'd like to raise is, with your permission and the permission of the committee, we have Legislative TV here today and it's a good thing. Is it acceptable to those presenting and also to the committee?

GARY BURRILL: That would be in order.

THE CHAIR: The agenda is before you. There is a resolution that has been put forward by Mr. Burrill, and we would like to have a few minutes to discuss that close to the end of the meeting. Could we have general approval of the agenda?

GARY BURRILL: Would it be in order to distribute copies of that resolution or do we have them?

THE CHAIR: They have been passed around at each spot. Approval of the agenda? Consider it approved. Thank you. At this time, I would ask committee members to introduce themselves.

[The committee members and witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I want to say what a pleasure it is to have you folks here before this committee today, each and every one of you, and we look forward to your presentation.

At this point we will turn it over to you. Usually there is about 15 minutes allowed for presentations but, with this distinguished group, you take as much time as you want - and we will have a series of questions afterwards. Thank you. Who would like to begin?

JACK HATCHER: Mr. Chairman, I would like to say that our presentations today were presentations that were made at our last meeting here - I believe it was in April. There wasn't much response that came back, so we're asking if it's okay to re-present those ideas that we had.

THE CHAIR: Certainly, this is a new committee - actually there are some newly-elected members on the committee as well. Some were on the previous committee, but most of us are new to this committee, including me, as Chairman, so we would be delighted to hear what you have to say.

JACK HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. What I would like to do, with your permission, is have each one make their presentation and if you wish to deal with them separately, that's okay, you can do that, or if you wish to do them collectively, after.

THE CHAIR: I think collectively, afterwards, if the committee agrees to that. Is that acceptable? We'll hear from all of you and then go into questions.

JACK HATCHER: Okay, Mr. Chairman. The first one I'd like to call upon is our President, Comrade Les Nash, to give a brief description of the Royal Canadian Legion.

LES NASH: The Royal Canadian Legion, as we know it today, can be traced back to an organization known as the Great War Veterans' Association, which was formed after the First World War to look after the rights of veterans from that war. In 1925 a unity conference was held in Winnipeg, and at this time the Great War Veterans' Association was renamed the Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service League - BESL. In 1959 the BESL was dropped from the name and in 1961 the official name was changed to the Royal Canadian Legion.

The word "Royal" was conferred by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in recognition of the Legion's 35 years of dedicated service. The Act of Incorporation, Chapter 84 of the Statutes of Canada, 1948, as amended, is the authority for the Royal Canadian Legion.

The Legion has come a long way since those pioneer years of 1925 and 1926. Over the years it has established itself as a vigorous, effective voice in the Parliament of Canada, just as our Provincial Command has an effective working relationship with the Government of Nova Scotia through this committee.

Today the Legion continues to be involved in providing assistance to veterans, ex-servicepersons and their dependents. However, during the past three decades it has

become involved in the field of community service, and each year branches throughout the country dedicate hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours and spend millions of dollars on youth and senior citizens' programs, as well as looking after the care and comfort of the disabled, sick, aged, and needy. Some of the programs that Legions participate in for seniors are: the Seniors Expo; Group of IX; supplying accommodation for seniors' meetings, games and programs, et cetera; Meals on Wheels; Wheels to Meals; and seniors' transportation - just to mention a few.

Some of our youth programs include: Legion track and field, which goes to the national level; annual leadership training camp for up to 84 students; Call to Remembrance Competition; and poster and literary competitions that also lead to the national level - the national essay seniors winner for 2009 was from Nova Scotia and she represented the youth of Canada in Ottawa on Remembrance Day at the National Remembrance Day Ceremony. The Legion also has a Cadet Medal of Excellence which is presented to deserving cadets. Practically all the cadet units in Nova Scotia are sponsored or co-sponsored by our Legion branches, as well as Scouts, Guides, sport teams, et cetera.

The following types of membership in the Royal Canadian Legion are: ordinary, service or ex-service members of the Armed Forces, merchant marine, and RCMP; associate members - sons and daughters, grandchildren and spouses of ordinary members; affiliate voting - Canadian citizen or Commonwealth subject and is of federal voting age; affiliate non-voting - any citizen from an allied country, excluding Canada, in the Commonwealth who is of voting age.

I just have a little addendum I'd like to add after my history. Many of our Legion buildings are old and are in need of repairs to bring them up to the provincial fire, electrical and heating standards. We understand there are various programs throughout different departments that may be used by Legion branches to help defray the costs of the above mentioned problems.

As members here are aware, these Legion branches are the only community centres in their area. Based on that, one of the requests of our committee today is for the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs to support a request to government for annual funding for upgrades to Legion branches across the province in consultation with Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, President Nash.

JACK HATCHER: Mr. Chairman, our next speaker will be Comrade Dave Blanchard and he has three that he would like to present.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Blanchard.

DAVID BLANCHARD: Good morning, everyone. My three presentations I will

be bringing before your this morning, as Comrade Jack had mentioned, had previously been brought before this committee and I might add that in accordance to the Hansard of the date that was recorded here, it was agreed by that committee that they backed us 100 per cent with the recommendations we brought in.

Just as a little bit of a preamble to it, my first one is on Salsa Bingo and iBingo. I don't know how many people here are familiar with this. 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 bingo game is played and the prizes start at \$400 and go up to a jackpot that can be in the thousands of dollars - I'm talking \$20,000, \$30,000 to \$40,000. These are larger prizes than Legion bingo halls can afford or are allowed by the laws of Nova Scotia. Our Legion bingos - like any other bingos within the province - have a limit of \$15,000. This game can be played 24 hours a day, except for approximately two minutes at 10:00 a.m. each day to allow for regular draw maintenance on their machinery - that's on the Salsa bingo.

[9:15 a.m.]

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

That being said, our concern about these two on-line bingo games is that they are drawing our bingo players away from our bingo halls, especially players who smoke. As we all know, they can't smoke with the exception of on the Native places while playing bingo or at any other time at the bingos, but at this game, you play these two games in the comfort of your home, so you can smoke. Many of our bingo players who do come to our games are spending less money. This is because everybody has an allotment base they're going to spend, so if they have \$50 a week and they've already spent \$25 on one of these other bingo games, that leaves \$25 for us.

This means we are making less money and in some cases our prizes have been decreased and sadly, some branches have suspended their games. Bingo revenues are very important to branches as they help to fund capital and community projects. When one plays on-line bingo, it is possible to pay for the cards by credit card, by debit card, electronic transfers or Web cash. All of these payment options are not available in our bingo halls.

As a matter of fact, as of March 2009, a Legion with a VLT machine will not be allowed to have an ATM or ABM which will accept a credit card. I'll go into this more in one of my other presentations.

Most of our Legions in Nova Scotia are having hard times financially. They are struggling to continue being 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 Lottery Corporation and the Internet. Non-profit, charitable organizations for many years have been successful in raising the much needed funds to carry out their work by running bingo games but they are now losing a goodly part of this income to the Atlantic Lottery Corporation.

Revenue 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 the 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.

Credit card use at ATM and ABM machines located in Legions with VLTs. As of March 2009, ATMs and ABMs in Legion branches no longer accept credit cards and only accept debit cards. In recent meetings with Mr. Bradley Conrad, Director, Lottery Gaming, it is our understanding that this is being done so that VLT players won't overextend their credit cards. This does not prevent anyone who wants to use their credit card to get money by going to another ABM location. It is also easy for one to get overdraft on their bank account which will let them use their debit cards to play on what is borrowed money.

Legion branches who have ATMs and ABMs receive a commission on all transactions that go through these machines. They are now losing this revenue on any transaction that used to be made on credit cards. Mr. Conrad could not supply us with any information advising how much credit card money was being used on VLTs. A good number of our members used the money they get from ATMs for uses other than going to VLTs. We have a lot of our veterans who use this at the end of the month, they have their pensions coming in on the last week, and they can't use it to come into the Legion, no matter what they're going to use the money for because we don't have that capability.

It is our feeling that this is very unfair to our members. It also cuts back on revenues that Legion branches receive in commissions from credit card transactions that could be put to use in the operation of a Legion branch. Basically my reference on this is the video lottery retail policies, Nova Scotia, which is in this - this is part of it here. That is my presentation on the part with the ATM and the VLTs.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

DAVID BLANCHARD: Now my third and last one is on bingo cookie jar taxes. Now maybe I should explain this; maybe some know what I'm talking about and some don't. Okay, when a bingo player comes in, you buy your bingo cards and everything and they get set to play. Now they have an option, and different bingos have different names for it: cookie jar, loonie jar, toonie jar. What they do, everybody puts \$1 or \$2 into this

special prize. They get a stamp on their bingo card or some stamp on their arm.

If they go bingo on a game that this pre-selected number, let's say B1 - at the beginning of the evening, a number is hauled out for the cookie jar number and it's B1, we'll say. So you go bingo on a game and the last number called was B1, that's what lets you go bingo. Then, if you've put into the cookie jar, you win the cookie jar. That's your prize. If nobody wins it tonight, this cookie jar keeps building and building. I've seen cookie jars that have been close to \$10,000 - or loonie jar or whatever you call it. One place here called it the cookie jar, next time it is the loonie jar, but they are both common names for this game played at bingo halls.

For players to participate in this game, they must pay \$1 or \$2 or whatever the amount is the bingo hall sets. They have a bingo book stamped to certify that they have paid. A random bingo number is picked at the beginning of the game and if one player wins the game on this selected number, they win the pot. All of the money that is paid into this pot goes back to the winning player, whether it be one night's winnings or six weeks winnings, it all goes back to the player who wins it. The bingo hall keeps none of this money. This pot may be built for weeks or months, and thus sometimes can be worth up over \$10,000.

Our problem with this is that we have to pay 2.5 per cent taxes on the money, even though we don't keep any of it. The problem was brought up at a meeting we had with Mr. Brad Conrad, Director, 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. I thank you for my presentation.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Past President Blanchard. An excellent presentation.

JACK HATCHER: Mr. Chairman, our next presenter will be Comrade Steve Wessel. That is the extra handout that you have.

STEVE WESSEL: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Jack said it is the loose pages that are marked Veterans Memorial Highway.

Approximately nine years ago our Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command of the Royal Canadian Legion made a request of the Government of Nova Scotia to recognize our veterans through the renaming of Highway No. 102. 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 smaller signs about 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 then-Minister of Transportation and Public Works, Ron Russell, was also in attendance 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 dedication by the then-committee Chairman, Mr. Bill Langille.

The significant points raised in the quotes above state that the dedication of the highway would serve as a daily reminder of the sacrifices that have been made and are continuing to be made by our Canadian veterans. Since 2002, 133 of our troops have been killed in action in Afghanistan; 11 of these were from Nova Scotia. The swell of pride by Canadians all across our country for our military is growing steadily through Red Friday celebrations, the support of the Royal Canadian Legion's Troop Morale Fund, and the sheer outpouring of emotion along the Highway of Heroes in Ontario upon the repatriation of those veterans killed in action in Afghanistan.

We also see the pride our veterans have in themselves, through the ever-growing numbers of veterans licence plates we see on our streets and highways. The veterans licence plate project started here, in this committee room, in November 2001. To date, nearly 10,000 plates have been issued.

The Canadian Forces have great pride in the work they do, and believe me when I say they 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 - especially those killed in action - 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 to them 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 all 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. Now if you turn to that, the signage is simple: it would include the poppy in red and black, with the words, "Veterans Memorial Highway."

These signs could be either mechanically attached to the existing signposts or adhesively attached to the 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 - the size of the existing small signs that are already on the side of the road.

Unfortunately, I cannot give you an estimate of costs associated with the addition of these new signs, but I am sure 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. Therefore, we are requesting this committee's assistance in convincing the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal to increase the visible signage recognizing the importance of our Veterans Memorial Highway.

[9:30 a.m.]

In conjunction with the additional signage intended to bring renewed recognition to the entire memorial highway, we would also request this committee's assistance in another aspect of this proposed project. As mentioned, the two major signs at either end of the Veterans Memorial Highway are located in Truro and at Miller Lake. The saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words, so if I could get you to refer to the photo marked Annex B. That indicates the present condition of the area surrounding the sign at Miller Lake.

This area is typical for the average highway sign. It is overgrown with bushes, which are growing thicker and taller every summer. This photo was taken when the additional Last Post Fund signage was placed a year or so ago, and the bushes have grown up even more since then. With leaves on it in the summertime, it is getting up to about one-third or more of the way up the signposts themselves.

Now, if you would please turn to Annex C, which is the photo of the same signage, located at Exit 14 near Truro. Quite a difference. Through the generous efforts of the Royal Canadian Legion Colchester Branch No. 26 in Truro, the area surrounding this sign has been completely upgraded in order to bring dignity and true meaning to the words printed on the sign, Lest We Forget. Unfortunately, there isn't a local Legion branch in the vicinity of the Miller Lake sign but our Legion Command head office in Burnside, through our public relations committee, has accepted the responsibility of ensuring that this sign is also upgraded to similar status of the one in Truro.

Therefore, we are requesting this committee's assistance in convincing the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal to work in conjunction with the Royal Canadian Legion to do all that is necessary to improve the area surrounding the Veterans Memorial Highway sign located near Miller Lake.

That is my presentation, Mr. Chairman, and I might add to that I have had a conversation with our Premier, the Honourable Darrell Dexter, and he personally told me

to call the minister in charge, but I thought it best that I went through this committee to have your assistance with this.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. I think this committee will discuss this fully and I can prejudge that it will be supportive in this going forward to the minister. It was an excellent presentation with a lot of meat in it.

JACK HATCHER: Mr. Chairman, our next presentation and our last one is by Comrade Marc Gauthier on veterans disability benefits.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Gauthier.

MARC GAUTHIER: Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, the focus of our presentation is to discuss veterans disability benefits which Community Services defines as income and are 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 of 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 Honourable Judy Streach, Minister of Community Services, indicating that it 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 purposes of applications under provincial social programs. This fact was confirmed by staff at the Nova Scotia Department of Seniors, prior to inclusion in briefing material. It should be noted that all provinces were canvassed and replies obtained in August and September, 2007, 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 each 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 practices of other provinces because it is misleading and factually incorrect. It would also appear that the minister's comments that, contrary to the assertions of the Federal Superannuates National Association, it is our understanding that no province uses an applicant's income tax return to define their income” is misplaced as no such assertion was made in our presentation to our committee or our letter to the minister.

The fact remains that, with the exception of Ontario which empowers each of its municipalities to make such considerations, the veterans' income under the Pension Act is neither included when calculating taxable income 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 the Minister of Community Services be asked to review the facts, especially as they relate to the practice in British Columbia, Manitoba, 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 recommendation 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 monies for gallantry or is in receipt of a prisoner of war pension would have their financial awards exempted. Yet those that 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 the purposes of calculating rental charges. 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 received 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 this 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.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

MARC GAUTHIER: Part two of my presentation, in way of addendum, you'll see that I've included the following. In a letter dated May 2, 2009, Mr. Bernie LaRusic, Chairperson for the Group of IX, wrote the Minister of Community Services on behalf of the Group of IX requesting consideration be granted to exempt veterans' disability pensions as income for the purpose of calculating rental charges for public housing. A copy of Mr. LaRusic's letter is attached for your convenience.

Also in a letter dated July 31, 2009, Ms. Judith Ferguson, Deputy Minister of Community Services, confirms the minister's decision to include veterans' disability pensions as income in accordance with the Household Income Facilities and Equipment database, HIFE. In their letter, the department failed to extend any consideration to the fact that disability pensions granted by Veterans Affairs Canada is a tax-free payment to veterans with permanent disabilities resulting from injuries or disease incurred in the performance of military service on behalf of all Canadians. A copy of Ms. Ferguson's letter is also attached.

Also attached is information from Veterans Affairs Canada, Revenue Canada Taxation and government publications confirming disability pensions are tax-exempt compensations paid to qualified veterans suffering from permanent disability issues. Thank you very much.

JACK HATCHER: Mr. Chairman, that concludes our presentation. We're open for questions.

THE CHAIR: Very, very impressive presentations here this morning. You've given us a considerable amount of homework as well with relation to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, the Minister of Community Services, the Minister of Finance and the Attorney General. I appreciate all that has been said here to this committee on behalf of the committee.

This committee operates somewhat differently than other committees with time allowance to each Party. We have decided that we will just do a speaker's list and, if that's acceptable to the committee, we'll do that. We'll start with the Honourable Murray

Scott.

HON. MURRAY SCOTT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I thank Command for being here today and presenting to us some issues that I know are very close to the work you are doing and your ability to provide for members, particularly veterans, as has been my experience over the last 12 years.

Mr. Chairman, are we going to deal with each issue individually and then decide on motions on each issue, rather than all over the place?

THE CHAIR: Sure, we could do that if you would like to bring forward a motion.

MURRAY SCOTT: Thank you. Just in regard to the president's presentation as regards I guess a request for annual funding for capital projects, there are departments now that have some programs available that would assist - Health Promotion and Protection, for example, Economic and Rural Development, Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations. There are probably some programs within those departments that may be of benefit to the Legion as it is to other community organizations throughout the province, but when you don't know about those it is very difficult to be able to assess those.

I guess a question I had for you, Mr. President, in regard to your presentation - when you talk about some annual funding, I'm assuming you're not talking about large amounts, millions of dollars of money? Am I assuming right - you're talking about small annual grants that may be available to help, for example, a small branch somewhere in an area that may otherwise not have access to funds? Is that kind of what you're . . .

LES NASH: A lot of our communities, as you're aware, are small branches and they may have to change their wiring and, yes, it's going to cost money but it's not going to cost hundreds of thousands. We're sort of looking for these small grants that would be given to replace the wiring. It would cost from \$6,000 to \$8,000 to \$10,000, whatever. Even sometimes in these small buildings they have panelling and that has to come out. What we're looking at here is a fund, say small loans to help these branches to do this. In some cases they don't have the money to do that, and some are closing because of it. We lost two branches last year, small branches, because of this and the fact that the membership has fallen off, too. Yes, we're looking to this fund as a small loan to help small branches.

MURRAY SCOTT: Mr. Chairman, so you're talking about a grant, not a loan.

LES NASH: Yes, grants.

MURRAY SCOTT: And you're talking about small amounts, the amounts you just talked about, and also your request is that however that could be worked out with government would work with your office to facilitate how that would actually transpire

and how it would take place to determine need, I guess, throughout the province, who would . . .

LES NASH: As we stated, we would work with the government and it would go through us and the government. They would apply to the government and then they'd let us know what was happening so we have an idea that what's happening is true and they need it.

MURRAY SCOTT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Ms. Kent, and then Mr. Gaudet.

[9:45 a.m.]

BECKY KENT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, certainly want to thank each and every one of you for coming in. It would be no surprise we would all agree around the table, I am sure, that the work you do is evident in all of our communities certainly, and I commend you particularly for your advocacy with the youth in our communities - we all struggle with bringing reality to the sacrifices that our men and women in the past have experienced and how it has impacted our lives, and we need to send that message to them. So thank you for that and keep up the great work.

Regarding the capital infrastructure request that you have put forward today, a couple of things. When we're talking about buildings and the upkeep of them, the first thing that comes to my mind is an inventory - I know that I have a great Legion in Eastern Passage, I know there's one in Dartmouth, I know there's one in Cole Harbour, and I know there are pockets around Nova Scotia, but I don't really have a good sense of how many buildings are we talking about and to what degree are they in disrepair or in need of maintenance. My question to you is, do you have some form of an inventory or a status for the entire province, because you know when government is looking at infrastructure support, we need to consider the whole province.

I think it's important that we look at it in terms of over a period of years, not band-aids here and there. An influx of a significant amount of money to a Legion like in Eastern Passage would be great, but there are needs all across the province. I'm thinking that our government, and in particular our minister and their department - it would be helpful to have a solid sense of where you stand across the province so that if there are any funding opportunities they can look at it for a number of years, as opposed to one year at a time or one moment in time. Do you have anything like that?

LES NASH: Yes. If you look on our region Web site, we have a picture of pretty near every branch in the province and it gives their age and anything you need to know about the building. Part of what happens is when your Fire Marshals and whomever go out and do their inspections, this is what happens in these smaller branches - finally it's time to catch up. I guess what we're looking at is sometimes it is time that it has to be

fixed in such and such a time and they don't always have time, these smaller branches, to fundraise, so this is why we're looking at these small grant loans to help them get through this if they have to change their wiring or whatever. Yes, we can, and it is on our Web site - all of our buildings, or 95 per cent of them are on it - and you can go on our Legion Web site and all these buildings can be checked out and the repairs, and there are pictures of them.

BECKY KENT: So on the Web site it would actually indicate - for instance, I'm thinking ahead where a government or a department would need information about what the needs are. It would actually be on the Web site about the kinds of things -

LES NASH: No, our needs wouldn't be, no.

BECKY KENT: I guess that's what I'm looking at. I'm throwing that out there, food for thought, because dialogue that could potentially happen - those are discussions that no doubt will have to be had. It's not enough, I don't think, just to say that there are a lot of buildings out there that need work. I'm just encouraging you to start to wrap your heads around the details of that kind of thing.

When you say "small amounts" - and I thank you, Mr. Scott, for clarifying loans versus grants, because they are different, and perhaps loans are an option too - really, what are you talking about?

LES NASH: What I was thinking about, when all these things happen, these branches, they usually run between \$5,000, \$6,000, \$8,000 to \$10,000 in these smaller branches. Not the bigger ones, mind you, but the branches out in the small communities.

BECKY KENT: Okay, great. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Gaudet.

HON. WAYNE GAUDET: Mr. Chairman, I too want to thank our special guests here this morning for their presentations. I'm just looking for some clarification. First of all, do Legions now receive any type of assistance to help with general repairs? I'm thinking from Veterans Affairs, for example.

LES NASH: No.

WAYNE GAUDET: So there's no assistance coming from any sources?

LES NASH: Nothing.

WAYNE GAUDET: Nothing, okay. Has the command brought this type of request to the national level? Have you brought these requests before your national association?



LES NASH: I don't think so, no.

WAYNE GAUDET: So it has never gone further out?

STEVE WESSEL: If I may, Mr. Gaudet, every provincial command - and there are 10 of them across the country - are responsible for all of the branches within their own jurisdiction. Anything to do with a local branch in Nova Scotia, our Dominion Command in Ottawa would say that it is our responsibility to look after that because they fall underneath our Charter as a Command of Nova Scotia/Nunavut.

WAYNE GAUDET: So the Dominion Command would not listen to this type of request?

STEVE WESSEL: Most or all requests with regard to general business of the Royal Canadian Legion would have to be brought up by resolution at our dominion conventions, which occur every two years, but that's mostly with regard to the way the organization is run, not to the individual branch - unless it, by bylaw, would affect the individual branches. With regard to repairs and whatnot of the local Legion branch, that's all left up to the branch first of all, then the area they may be in, and then our Command, so it falls within our jurisdiction.

WAYNE GAUDET: Thank you for those clarifications.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Kent.

BECKY KENT: Regarding capital repairs at the Legions around the province, is there a requirement through your Command that they proceed and acquire permission, or is there a process that keeps you in the loop regarding their efforts? Why I'm asking that is, are we potentially in a scenario where Command, through you, would be having dialogue with the department or the minister at the same time that we have individual legions that might be off working on the same thing and then potentially competing with each other - but not really, just not having a handle on what requests are coming in and managing them to the best of our ability through government funding?

LES NASH: Every legion that goes to repairs or spends over a certain number of dollars must request permission from Provincial Command, so we are aware of any legion that is going to do major renovations or whichever.

BECKY KENT: So you would be aware of what their funding sources would be and their fundraising efforts and all of that?

LES NASH: Yes.

BECKY KENT: Okay, good enough. There was a comment, and I can't remember if it was Mr. Blanchard who spoke to it or you, Les, about government support in

Hansard in the past for the requests that are coming through. When you say - I'm wondering if we can have a copy of what was on - I don't have it here in front of me, and I'm just - you've got it there, do you? Okay, if I could have a look at that, or do you want to speak to it?

DAVID BLANCHARD: I was referring to Hansard, Nova Scotia House of Assembly, Committee on Veterans Affairs, Thursday, April 9, 2009. That is in this part of Hansard here and that is for this meeting that we had back then. Everything that is in here is what went on at that meeting where I said the committees, their motions and everything, as we all know, are recorded in this copy of Hansard from Thursday, April 9<sup>th</sup>.

THE CHAIR: I wonder if the Clerk could make that available to all the members, in an effort for us to follow up on all of the proposals that you put forward for consideration.

BECKY KENT: I think that would be helpful. From my inexperience on the committee, is it likely that we'll be considering further requests or motions on the floor today, or in the future? That would make a difference. So perhaps if we could get a copy of that sooner rather than later, yes, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Yes, that would be helpful because I do anticipate there will be some motions that we will be dealing with. Mr. Theriault.

HAROLD THERIAULT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for your presentation. It is always good to hear from the Command about the legions, and I'm very interested in the legions because in my riding I have five of them. Last year, through Democracy 250, I had a chance as an MLA to have \$10,000 in my hand to help the legions out. I had to split that up among five of them in my riding. They never got very far with a couple of thousand bucks. A couple got their doorsteps fixed, a couple got a window or two, or a door, and that was about it.

Then I hear some of the veterans saying, we have too many legions in this riding, what are we going to do down the road? Not that we want to close any legions, but you know, how many legions are there in this province? Do you see some of these legions having to amalgamate, come together in a small community like Digby-Annapolis, maybe make the five into four or three? Do you see anything like that happening? Do you see legions having to close in this province?

LES NASH: Yes, we do. We have 124 - 116, sorry, we're losing some of them. We have talked about amalgamation to other branches, but I guess until such time as they can't operate, these veterans are, no, this is our branch and we're keeping it as long as we can until such time as that runs out, where they're going to have to. But we do suggest amalgamation at different times, especially if one branch closes and they do have members left; we always encourage them to amalgamate with their closest branch or wherever they want to go. We do encourage that and we do know the day is coming it is

going to have to happen, but they will stand as long as they are able to keep it running.

HAROLD THERIAULT: Is there much work being done to create a bigger membership, you know, to work on growing the membership? I think that probably 75 per cent of the membership are men and there are more women involved now in Veterans Affairs, becoming veterans. Is there more drive to build that membership and direct it at more women?

LES NASH: In every command mail-out, we promote membership and yes, not just females. Where we're driving the most is our ex-military who are getting out and are still young, they don't seem to be joining as fast as we would like them to and we're losing a lot there and there are a lot of females in that. We encourage everybody to join, men and women, and we're always doing membership drives, always. Sometimes it is hard or whatever, but we still continue looking for new members.

HAROLD THERIAULT: Is it successful, is the membership growing?

LES NASH: We're trying to make it grow, but what we're trying to do is keep our deceased list, that happens every year, and keep it balanced. Actually, Nova Scotia has won awards from across Canada last year for keeping their rate higher than any province and we actually won the award. For instance - I'm just going to use this figure, it's not accurate but - we had 27,000 members last year and we still have close to 27,000 members this year because our new members defrayed our deceased members.

HAROLD THERIAULT: I believe Nova Scotia has the biggest membership per capita than any other province in this country.

LES NASH: Yes, it does. Per capita, yes.

HAROLD THERIAULT: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Scott:

MURRAY SCOTT: I have no other questions, Mr. Chairman, but a motion to move.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps, if you don't mind, Mr. Burrill, first before the motion, he hasn't had a chance yet.

GARY BURRILL: Like others, I appreciate everything about this presentation today, but I especially appreciate being made aware of this matter about the disability benefits. I'm sure it would be clearer, in more detail to me, once I've read through the appendices to what you presented. I just want to make sure that I understand what these benefits are.

You said in your presentation that these are benefits that are awarded under the federal Pension Act, and in others things you said, like speaking about awards for gallantry or compensation in view of prisoner of war periods, it sounds like a DVA pension. Is it a Pension Act under DVA?

[10:00 a.m.]

MARC GAUTHIER: Absolutely, it is the Pension Act, the same with awards for gallantry, prisoners of war, those come from Veterans Affairs. You may not have necessarily been wounded, injured in any way, shape or form, but still have been awarded something for gallantry or being a prisoner of war. What we're talking about here are pensions, disability pensions, awarded by Veterans Affairs, for someone who has been injured or suffers from permanent disability incurred because of service-related duties.

GARY BURRILL: So I just want to make sure I've got it completely. None of these benefits are benefits related under the Canada Pension Disability Plan?

MARC GAUTHIER: That's right, it's totally separate. If I may make an analogy, it would be the Workers' Compensation for our veterans. Members of our Armed Forces and RCMP, as well, do not have access to a provincial workers' compensation; their Workers' Compensation Board, if you will, is Veterans Affairs. If they're hurt, suffering a service-related injury, they have to turn to Veterans Affairs for assistance and are then awarded something. Since April 1, 2006, under the new Veterans Charter Act, they're given an award, which is a lump sum, a one-shot deal, for pain and suffering.

That takes care of that, but under the old Act, the old Pension Act, up and until that date anyone applying would have gotten a monthly pension. It varies, of course, depending on the seriousness of your injury. It could be \$100 or \$200 a month to maybe \$1,000 but, again, it is for pain and suffering - loss of quality of life. It is tax-free, that's how Revenue Canada looks at it and so does Veterans Affairs. So we're having our old veterans being penalized - on one hand, they're getting a disability pension and on the other hand this disability pension has been included in the calculation by this province when they're applying for social housing. Of course, since 2006, that doesn't happen any more.

GARY BURRILL: Did I understand from your opening comments, Mr. Hatcher, that this clarification that you introduced in April, to the presentation you had made in the previous year, was not responded to?

JACK HATCHER: It was responded to, but everything that came back was negative. You have copies of the response in your package there.

DAVID BLANCHARD: I might add one thing on those responses, as we all know, it wasn't too long after, the way the government wheels turn, that the government of that day was no longer in power to do anything that was done there, so this is why

we're back with basically the same program this time.

THE CHAIR: Just before proceeding, I know Mr. Scott has a motion to put forward, but we have two who have requested to speak - if Mr. Scott wouldn't mind, if they could just ask their questions first . . .

MURRAY SCOTT: On the same subject?

THE CHAIR: Yes, certainly. So I have Mr. Zinck and Mr. Prest (Interruptions) Okay, perhaps we should deal with your motion first and then proceed with the further questions. We have a number of motions that are required here, and what we will do - we certainly have five people who will bring us to task if we leave anything out. We expect you to follow up, if there's something that we haven't responded to I'm sure you will bring that forward.

If I could make a comment in relation not to pension but to an allocation that is given for snow removal, for lawn care and all that kind of thing - it's considered to be income by the province, but not by Revenue Canada, and we were talking about the overall picture here. I have one case that I'm very, very concerned about, a chap in his 80s who, in fact, does not qualify for a program because he is \$200-and some over and that's very disheartening.

WAYNE GAUDET: Mr. Chairman, I'm just looking for clarification. Do you want to open the discussion to different topics or do you want to treat one topic at a time and to try to come to a resolution? I'm just looking for guidance from the Chairman.

THE CHAIR: Sure. We will deal with one topic at a time. This is a relatively loose committee in relationship to questions and so on - we don't even break the time down in this committee.

Let's proceed with the first motion, then.

MURRAY SCOTT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to make a motion that the Veterans Affairs Committee request the provincial government to work with the Royal Canadian Legion, Nova Scotia Nunavut Command, to establish an annual grant program to assist the Legions throughout the province in regard to capital needs.

WAYNE GAUDET: I second that motion.

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

The motion is carried.

We have two speakers that we haven't heard from yet. It's Mr. Zinck and then Mr. Prest.

TREVOR ZINCK: Just so I'm correct in my proceedings, we can dance around, so to speak, on a different issue or do you just want me to speak to housing?

THE CHAIR: To be truthful, I'm a very unorthodox Chair and I don't mind dancing around as long as everything is looked after in the process. Feel free.

TREVOR ZINCK: Cut me off at any time if I go over. Gentlemen, first of all I'd like to apologize for my tardiness and echo the sentiments of every other member. I want to thank you for your presentation and for coming here today. I think it's a good first start for this committee to have your presentations.

On a personal note, over the last two years I've unfortunately had two uncles pass who were members of the Black Watch and served in Korea. I was reacquainted with the two gentlemen since 2006; there was a 30-year lapse of time where they had fallen out of favour with our family, and one in particular had suffered from dementia. They found him in Yarmouth and he had the clothes on his back and his legion membership book.

My other uncle I was reacquainted with in 2006 was a member of my constituency; I was happy to be reacquainted with him as well. He was a member of the Chester Branch, and he too had always praised the legion for helping him through the years with his disability. For somebody who may not have frequented legions over the years, it became quite apparent to me the important role that each legion plays in the communities in serving those members who had served in previous wars. I want to thank you for that.

I just want to make a comment with reference to the housing and the grants, Mr. Gauthier. There are a couple of issues that I really see with this that are unfortunate. One of the issues is the lack of seniors' housing in Nova Scotia - housing in general. We have tremendous wait lists and a tremendous need in our province. One of the key things I would like to see happen is that, one, we work with the federal government, as a province, on an overall housing strategy which would obviously include more emphasis on seniors' housing, especially in this province with our aging population, the largest in all of Canada. A key component of that could perhaps be a special designation for veterans who have served, who would obviously be in receipt of these pensionable monies. That would allow us to look at their greater needs.

I was reading the briefing note from the deputy minister as of July 31<sup>st</sup> and I noted that she particularly had outlined the units and what they include - a fridge, a stove, and that the heat's paid for. That's great. A lot of our units are paid for and we give subsidies in a lot of these units, but I think to meet the need - unfortunately, we're losing more veterans every year, and I don't really see the small number who would be able to benefit

from this as being a huge overall burden to the province.

I think a special designation on those applications that are put in that state, or have a box to check off, "veteran" would allow the department to look at that to find an area and work with that individual. Some of these gentlemen and women are in their last days and it would mean a lot to have that extra savings.

The other issue I want to talk about, Mr. Blanchard, is your presentation on the bingos. I have a couple of questions. Has the legion, in their conversations with Mr. Conrad at Gaming - have you had that conversation about the loss of revenues or the potential revenue gains that you might be able to have in reference to possibly having a share of the monies coming from Salsa Bingo and iBingo? Has that taken place?

DAVID BLANCHARD: Yes, that basically has taken place. I'm not saying the man has an excuse or anything else like that, but the bottom line always comes back to us - it is up to the government. The government tells us this policy, they tell us that policy. They say, in order for you to get some of this money back, it has to go through the government, through Atlantic Lotto, the whole channel of communication. Basically, he was just bringing the message, there wasn't too much he could do about it. This was when I stated, in one part, where he told us to bring this up so it would go before the Attorney General and the Minister of Finance because that had all things to do with the handling or collection of taxes and whatnot.

TREVOR ZINCK: Thank for you that. In reference to the cookie jar, the loonie and toonie jars - did he mention to you, or explain to you, why the Gaming Corporation has a 2.5 per cent tax on those monies, even though the Legions and the bingo halls don't actually make revenues off of it, per se? Have they explained that fully, why they do that?

DAVID BLANCHARD: No, other than to say that - from my recollection now, it was over a couple of years ago - it was all part of dollars and cents and government policy was the part of it that this tax, yes, has to be levied. That was about the extent of that one, as I remember.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Gauthier.

MARC GAUTHIER: Mr. Chairman, to Mr. Zinck. First of all, thank you very much for your suggestion on the special designation - this is certainly a breath of fresh air, thank you very much. Yes, we have, nationally speaking, approximately 2,000 veterans die each month in Canada. For many of them it is not so much the money that they won't have in their pockets at the end of the month, it is on one hand, the government shows respect and gratitude by saying okay, you got hurt, here's a little pension for you, enjoy that and it's tax free, it's beautiful. On the other hand, you have the provincial government saying okay, we will include that in the calculation and we'll take a chunk of that. One shows gratitude and respect, the other doesn't, it's just not fair, give it with one hand and take it with the other.

Again, since April 1, 2006, the government stopped doing that because now instead of a monthly pension, anyone applying for disability pension benefits does so under the new Veterans Charter and they now get an award. This lump sum award is not included in the calculation, because that's a one-shot deal and that's it, it's not recurring month in and month out. Our new breed of veterans, or those who applied since April 1, 2006, are not penalized if you wish, but those who applied prior to April 1, 2006, and are now getting a monthly disability pension are being penalized and often, these are our older veterans being penalized, it's not right.

[10:15 p.m.]

TREVOR ZINCK: My point being is that's where the unfortunate part is that I see on behalf of the department happens. Whether it's the Second, the First - not many from the First, obviously - but the Korean War and the Vietnam War, I wouldn't know what the number is overall, but I'm sure it would have little impact. Unfortunately, the lack of housing really hurts, overall, If we could increase the housing stock for seniors, per se, I think it would be a lot easier to, like I said, have that special designation just for veterans, so that we look at those applications in a much different way because we don't want to penalize them after they have served.

I just want to stay with Mr. Blanchard for a couple more questions. Just so the committee gets a full understanding of revenues coming into the Legion, what do the Legions do with the revenue that comes in from the VLTs, how is that money used?

DAVID BLANCHARD: Most of your branches would take their revenues coming in from VLTs for their basic everyday operations, heating the buildings and that; there are the youth programs that we talked about here previously. For instance, the leadership camp that's held every year, we've been holding it at the Agricultural College in Truro. That is funded through either - Provincial Command has to put so much into it and then each branch basically has to pay \$150 for every student that they sponsor. That adds up, and the program, I've always said, just on that program there, we get every bit.

One thing I always like to say when we're talking about that is Mr. McNeil, the Leader of the Official Opposition - he told me this one time, and it's the truth - that's where he met his wife, at the leadership camp. I always kind of kid him about, well, we can always look to you for backing on that one - maybe, yes. Well, no, he's always got to vote on it, whether he's on one side or the other, right? I got out of that one, didn't I?

THE CHAIR: We have less than 45 minutes. We do have a number of motions to entertain, but we certainly don't want to cut off our questioning. Mr. Prest has not had an opportunity and he has requested to speak as well. Did you have one quick -

JACK HATCHER: If it's okay, Mr. Chairman, I just - go ahead, Mr. Blanchard.



DAVID BLANCHARD: Basically on the money the question was asked, what is the money used for? It is used for any operation that may be - it's not earmarked money, that this money goes for this specific thing. Most branches take that money and it's used for their - whether it be used for seniors' projects or to keep the building going or whatever the case may be, it goes into their general fund.

TREVOR ZINCK: I'll just wrap up real quickly, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for that, Mr. Blanchard, because I think it's important for us to really understand how important these revenues are and, as you've expressed in your report, the potential loss for revenues, the impact that would have on the legions and some of the programs that it offers, both to members and trying to encourage young folks to come in through the camps.

Just finally, have you talked with the membership or surveyed them as to how many might be playing online? Have you put that out in a questionnaire, maybe, to gauge how many of your membership are actually using the online stuff? The gaming corporation is going to come back and say, well, we don't have the numbers, we know our online revenues are up, we don't where the membership is coming from, what age groups, this type of thing. Have you actually surveyed members to kind of gauge where the potential loss of revenue is coming from?

DAVID BLANCHARD: No, we haven't, and one of the main reasons that we haven't is that I imagine if we went out with a survey on that, somebody is going to turn around and tell us, you go mind your own business, it's nobody's business how much money I spend but I will tell you one thing. At our legion branch in Windsor I sell books, and I have had customers come in who have said, oh, I'd have bought this or I'd buy more but I used some of my money, I was playing Salsa today or iBingo today or something like that. Other than that, we have no record, and I'm sure that the gaming corporation cannot come down with a number either. I guess you might call it personal information, when you start asking - getting out like that. What few customers we have left, we don't want to rile them up.

TREVOR ZINCK: Okay, thank you, gentlemen, for your time and your service.

STEVE WESSEL: Mr. Chairman, if I may, please, just before you get off the topic of revenues - I would like the committee to know that our poppy campaign, which committee members know occurs every year in November, that all of the funds that are collected through the poppy campaign are strictly designated for veterans and their dependents' use only. All of the money collected by individual branches and that is segregated in a completely different account. It has absolutely nothing to do with the legion branch, anything to do with programs or anything; it is strictly veterans and dependents. It is a trust fund that is set aside, and there is absolutely no government funding provided to any legions. I wanted to clarify that point.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. What we're going to do here - I know I jumped in once

out of sync to get something recorded about something I'm very concerned about in my own constituency that I deal with very often and have concerns about.

We're going to have to be relatively brief here, Mr. Prest, because we have a number of motions to put through, but we want to hear from everyone.

SIDNEY PREST: Thank you. I'm usually very brief. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to meet you people. Coming from a military family, older brothers and sisters who have served in the military, it's an honour for me to carry on and help you with your challenge. It's certainly well received out in the rural part of Nova Scotia where it gets a lot of attention paid to it.

I just have a couple of questions. Are the legion branches exempt from municipal taxes across the provinces?

LES NASH: Yes, we are.

SIDNEY PREST: All municipalities?

LES NASH: Yes.

SIDNEY PREST: What about insurance?

LES NASH: We're exempt from taxes, but we're not exempt from fire, water, sewer.

SIDNEY PREST: No, but I guess what I'm asking is, is there a chance you can get a blanket coverage for all the legions in the province?

LES NASH: We tried and tried, but it doesn't go because people say they're from our community, blah, blah, and there isn't that much difference. Actually one person came in and told us that probably no one company would want to take them all on at once. It was hard because the biggest complaints we had were, our insurance is not due until July and this one's not due - you know what I mean? It was tried at the Dominion level and it just didn't go off right.

SIDNEY PREST: So each legion branch has a separate policy?

LES NASH: Yes. Some of us have heard from others and gone to insurance companies that other legions are at. If we're paying a high price, of course we're telling our neighbours and whatever, we're getting it here for this, they may go and get it from that person.

SIDNEY PREST: Is there any other way you see the provincial government could contribute to your cause without a direct grant or financial assistance?

LES NASH: I don't off hand.

STEVE WESSEL: We're pretty set in our ways with regard to our programs and whatnot and our assistance toward veterans has been set in place for over 80 years now. It's mostly helping the individual branch.

Everything starts from the ground up. The roots of our organization are our individual branches across the country and if they begin to fail, then you can have as many provincial commands or dominion commands or provincial or dominion authority that you want, if there's no real basis for the organization, it has a tendency to fade away. We will not accept the Royal Canadian Legion disappearing from this country.

The small grant for a branch is a big thing in their eyes.

SIDNEY PREST: I guess what I'm getting at, as the gentleman on the end there mentioned, giving to you with one hand and taking from you with the other. That's not much benefit to you, is it?

STEVE WESSEL: With regard to pension benefits and that, yes. We deal strictly with Veterans' Affairs in Ottawa through resolution on those and those have been quite effective. The Royal Canadian Legion has been very effective.

With regard to things like Comrade Blanchard said, the small little things like this 2.5 per cent tax and the loss of our legion bingos, a lot of legion bingos have closed completely. That's an indication right there that they must be going somewhere because bingo players are very dedicated to their game, as you well know. If a legion bingo was prosperous two or three years before this online bingo started, and all of a sudden it's closed, those people are going somewhere to play the game. The smoking policy allows them to stay at home and use their credit card. You come into a legion and you can't smoke, you can't use your credit card anymore. A lot of seniors will use a credit card at a legion branch because they feel secure in using it there. The government has taken away that right of our veterans to do that.

SIDNEY PREST: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I have Mr. Gaudet and Ms. Kent. Ms. Kent has indicated she has a motion and perhaps Mr. Gaudet has one as well.

WAYNE GAUDET: Mr. Chairman, again, I want to go back to trying to address this need for assistance to help with repairs. I'm sure most of the committee members are aware, back in November 2007 the federal government had announced a seven-year infrastructure program called the Building Canada Fund, to help stimulate our economy, to help create jobs. Especially in the last year, we've seen some announcements of funding to assist with repairing rinks, repairing gyms, repairing parks, roads, bridges,

other types of infrastructures.

I would like this committee to consider writing a letter on behalf of the Nova Scotia Nunavut Command to request, through Veterans Affairs, that consideration should be given to allow Legions to apply for assistance for repairs under the Building Canada Fund. I'm ready to make that motion.

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

The motion is carried.

Ms. Kent.

BECKY KENT: Thank you. I'm going try to do this as painlessly as possible in the interest of time. I'm reflecting on the things you brought forward on the iBingo, the VLTs, the Gaming Corporation - that whole thing. I think the biggest thing that pops out to me is that there are unanswered questions. There's not a good rationalization, perhaps, from your perspective, as to why you've been denied, stopped in your tracks and all that. I'm thinking, from a perspective of not being here regularly, but if I was going to consider a future motion, I think there would be more detail that would be required.

I would like to suggest that before I put the motion on, if anyone wanted to comment, there be two options here. I think answers need to be had around the implications of a credit card being used at the Legion and how much of that is being used for VLTs, versus the other options that you're talking about, which I think are fair and reasonable uses for veterans to use - there are lots of ways that they can use their credit card at the Legion - and also the impact of that 2.5 per cent tax and those things.

I'm going to suggest one of two things, that Mr. Conrad or the department come in and answer to some of those questions here for the committee, or that the Chairman, working with the Nova Scotia/Nunavut branch, formulate some more specific questions and request that the answers come back to the committee for consideration before there is a direct motion for action. I think that it's reasonable that you get the answers to those questions with a change of government and with the current financial challenges that Nova Scotia is facing right now.

[10:30 a.m.]

When we start to reconsider allocation of revenues to the province with the deficit that we're facing and a commitment from our government to address that reasonably, the Gaming Corporation is an area where we need to understand the implications on that. Mr. Chairman, if you'd like to comment on what would be a reasonable approach before I put that motion on the floor, I will also have a motion on the signage, after that.

THE CHAIR: Certainly, either approach is acceptable. I, as Chairman, am willing to work to get those answers or we could have someone come in. It is at the pleasure of this committee if they want to have the Gaming folks respond directly to the committee. Mr. Zinck.

TREVOR ZINCK: I won't speak for Mr. Conrad, but I don't think it would be in our best interest to have him come before the committee as far as time. How much time would we allot him just specifically for these questions? I think we have an opportunity here in a motion to possibly draft a letter to the Gaming Corporation asking for a firmer response to some of the issues that Mr. Blanchard raised regarding the Legions and then perhaps going to the next level once we have those answers, which would be the Auditor General and the Department of Finance.

THE CHAIR: Is there agreement on that or would you like to have a motion to that? Mr. Scott.

MURRAY SCOTT: I've got copies of the letters here. This committee had already taken the position on these issues in April. Motions were made - in fact I'm just reading, some motions were made by now-government Cabinet Ministers who said, you know when you write a letter and get a response and you go back again if you want, the answer will still be no, based on da, da, da. What he's saying, basically, is we can go back again and we'll get the same answers.

The committee has already taken the position. It was signed by the previous Chair, direction was asked by this committee in regard to government, and it's up to government to take action on these issues. So my suggestion is that we deal with these issues individually. We take motions we're either going to support them or not, and ask government to take action.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Zinck.

TREVOR ZINCK: Mr. Scott, were those letters directly to the gaming corporation or was it to any government - was it to the Auditor General or to the Finance Department?

MURRAY SCOTT: One particular now in regard to the gaming corporation was addressed to the minister who is responsible for the Gaming Control Act. The Department of Finance, yes, was sent letters in regard to the 2.5 per cent. The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, in regard to transportation signs; Community Services, in regard to the issue they brought about housing and grants; and to Veterans Affairs in regard to smoke-free places.

If you look, you should note the letter that is in their presentation . . .

TREVOR ZINCK: July 31<sup>st</sup>.

MURRAY SCOTT: That's right, July 31<sup>st</sup> - that's the present government. What we need to do, as a committee, is to make motions what we're asking the government to take action on. If we just ask for more people to come to make presentations, we'll get just that. We'll just get another side to another issue that we've heard the presentations. My suggestion is that we make motions on these issues they brought before us, whether we're supporting them or we're not.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Kent is the next on the speaker's list, and I think you had a motion ready to go, did you not?

BECKY KENT: Well, my motion was going to be for further information. I think it's fair, what Mr. Scott has brought forward; we don't have the privilege of seeing those at this moment, I don't know how many of my colleagues here do. The financial position and situation that the province is now in has been clarified to this government, new committee, and I would be hesitant to - just around some of that, I'm not - the motion that I put on the floor for the signage, et cetera, and I'm not dealing with the one with Community Services around pension disability, I'm talking specifically to the gaming corporation considerations with the Auditor General and such.

At this point I think the best course of action is to work with - I understand, as Mr. Zinck and Mr. Scott have suggested, that maybe having committees come forward is not the best use of time, but I think that more information around the implications to the Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command and to our Finance and Auditor General, the budget of the province, that more discussion and more clarification, copies of those letters for consideration of the whole committee, is in order before motions on those ones.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Zinck.

TREVOR ZINCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Gentlemen, I want to apologize again. I wasn't on the previous committee; it is a new committee for me. Mr. Scott, you obviously have information that I would suggest we have answers from the previous government, one currently from the new government that is formed, that being from Minister Peterson-Rafuse from Community Services in the early days. I would say we go forward with the motions that were made back in April, I think, and go back to the current government and the ministers of the day, to have their response. I don't think there is a need to have somebody else come and present. I'm in agreement, I honestly don't need clarification.

THE CHAIR: The resolutions, of course - the Clerk is saying that each one will have to be reintroduced or a different approach, if that's your wish.

BECKY KENT: I guess at this point I'll put a motion on the floor that the Chair work with the Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command to revisit those resolutions and come forward to the next meeting with further consideration of information.

THE CHAIR: Is there a seconder for that?

BECKY KENT: Without the benefit of those resolutions in front of me, I . . .

TREVOR ZINCK: Mr. Chairman, I would be fine, based on the information Mr. Scott has in hand. I think that is the gist of some of the recommendations from Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command today, to go forward with some of those resolutions. I don't personally need any more clarification as to what direction we would go in. I think it is very clear - go to the government of the day and the current ministers with the resolutions and recommendations from the April meeting, of course, being reintroduced.

THE CHAIR: Certainly. There is no seconder for the motion that was put forward? (Interruptions) I'm being informed - I am new to this committee as well, I was a member before the election, but I have never served on this committee. The letters are based on the previous motions and I guess we do have some copies of the previous motions and we can certainly vote on those. I know we have a motion that has not been seconded.

I'm prepared to address this in any way you wish and I encourage some motions to come forward because we have to address the issues that were put before us this morning. Mr. Scott.

MURRAY SCOTT: Mr. Chairman, if I could and unless there are other speakers, each member should now have a list of the motions that were put before the previous committee. I understand they were accepted unanimously by all members of this committee, so that is a three-Party agreement on all these recommendations. I will point out that number five talks about smoke-free places in Nova Scotia and that's not something we had a chance to discuss today. I wouldn't be prepared to put a motion forward because I don't have any information on it, but the other ones you've talked about, Mr. Chairman, with your approval, I'll proceed through these motions. Are you agreeable to that?

THE CHAIR: Certainly, you can do one of them and of course, maybe someone else might want to raise another one. Certainly, you are free to bring in as many as you wish.

MURRAY SCOTT: I'll start with the first one, Mr. Chairman. The motion I would make would be that the committee pursue the recommendations that are before our committee to request officials from the Department of Finance to consider discontinuing the 2.5 per cent tax charged to Legions with regard to the bingos.

WAYNE GAUDET: I second that motion.

THE CHAIR: And this is a motion to reconsider the discontinuing of the 2.5 per

cent tax charged to Legions with regard to bingo. You've heard the motion, is there any discussion? Ms. Kent.

BECKY KENT: I'd just like to comment that I think, again, at this stage with our new government and the financial information that has come out regarding the fiscal challenges this province is facing, to put forward a motion that is specifically asking for a change in revenue to Nova Scotia - I'm not discounting in any way, shape or form the need for the dialogue, the impact it has, if there's another option, but we're asking specifically for that to be discontinued and I'm struggling with supporting that. I'm not struggling with taking it to the table. I think taking it to the table is the right thing to do with our new government and all of your issues, I really do. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: The motion is to reconsider. Does anyone find that . . .

BECKY KENT: Reconsider?

MURRAY SCOTT: No, no. Mr. Chairman, would you like me to read that again?

THE CHAIR: Please do because I thought you were reading what was there before.

MURRAY SCOTT: My motion is that the committee pursue the recommendations that are before our committee to request officials from the Department of Finance to consider discontinuing . . .

BECKY KENT: Consider discontinuing . . .

THE CHAIR: To consider, which is a reconsideration . . .

MURRAY SCOTT: The 2.5 per cent charge to Legions with regard to bingo. So, we don't have the power at this committee to instruct them to do it, but we're asking them to consider to discontinue that.

BECKY KENT: For clarity, to consider, okay.

THE CHAIR: And it is actually a reconsider because it was sent before. Mr. Zinck.

TREVOR ZINCK: Mr. Chairman, with regard to this resolution I think what we will receive back or perhaps could add to it, would be to have the Department of Finance provide an answer as to the potential impact, financially on the province that this might have. That would soothe, I think, some of the concerns of other members.

THE CHAIR: You've heard the motion. Is there further discussion? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.



[The motion is carried.]

MURRAY SCOTT: The second one then is that we again write the Minister of Community Services requesting that she look at this issue and the recommendation from the Legion Command ensuring that with her response she has the most updated information on the provinces that have exemptions, and that we would support the exemption of those funds being calculated in their household income for purposes of social housing upgrade grants.

THE CHAIR: It's been moved and seconded. Is there a discussion? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

MURRAY SCOTT: The third one would be that the committee call upon the minister responsible for gaming in our province to exempt Legions from this policy - that would be the letter to Minister Parent, Part II of the Gaming Control Act. The standing committee unanimously agreed to the following - that the committee call upon the minister responsible for gaming in our province to exempt Legions from this policy. That's the policy with regard to ATMs and VLTs not being allowed in the same buildings.

THE CHAIR: Duly moved and seconded.

GARY BURRILL: Is it in order to move that this motion, as well as the one that follows it, be tabled definitely until our next meeting?

THE CHAIR: Could we have further discussion on the motion, please?

BECKY KENT: Do we have a response to that letter that you could share?

THE CHAIR: Could we have clarification from the Clerk, please?

KIM LEADLEY: There were responses, but because the election was called, all committee business ceases.

BECKY KENT: So it's as if it never happened? I'd like to make an amendment to the motion that the committee call upon the minister responsible for gaming in our province to consider an exemption to the Legions from this policy. I'm not comfortable with it being a direct request without the clarification on why these things had happened. You never got those answers; we don't have that answer. If that's acceptable, I'd like to make that amendment.

THE CHAIR: Is there a seconder to the amendment? So we will vote on the amendment first.

WAYNE GAUDET: I'm just looking for clarification. Is it consideration for exemptions?

[10:45 a.m.]

BECKY KENT: Yes.

THE CHAIR: You've heard the amendment. We will vote on the amendment first. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

BECKY KENT: With the amendment?

MURRAY SCOTT: Someone has to read that motion back with the amendment.

THE CHAIR: It has been duly changed with the amendment. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried, as amended.

MURRAY SCOTT: I have one more motion I'd like to introduce, with your permission.

THE CHAIR: Certainly, Mr. Scott.

MURRAY SCOTT: The motion I would like to introduce at this time is to call upon the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal to increase the number of signs on our Veterans Memorial Highway, and we're calling upon the same minister to consult with our guests, members of Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command, to further determine the appropriate number of signs needed along this particular highway.

WAYNE GAUDET: I second the motion.

THE CHAIR: It's been moved and seconded. Discussion?

GARY BURRILL: Just a point of order. Was I to understand a motion to table is not in order, once we have a mover and seconder for a motion? If a motion to table is in order, I would like to make such a motion to table this motion definitely to the next meeting.

THE CHAIR: Certainly, you're making that in the form of a motion. We have a situation here. You can make an amendment to a motion and you could certainly make the tabling as an amendment to the . . .

BECKY KENT: Mr. Chairman, if I could add - I think the normal process would be that if it doesn't pass, then there's an option for a reconsideration of a motion, which would be to reconsider it at a further date. Would that be accurate, if your original motion didn't pass?

THE CHAIR: That's another way of doing it. We have a motion on the floor . . .

MURRAY SCOTT: You're saying - the motion is denied by the committee . . .

THE CHAIR: And we have a former Speaker of the House that we will call on for some clarification.

WAYNE GAUDET: Mr. Chairman, technically when a motion is made it can be amended, and if it's not being amended then of course the committee has to deal with the motion that is before the committee - so either we vote to support or we vote to reject the motion, okay? If it's rejected, it's discarded and the discussion continues. If an additional motion wishes to be made, then that would be the appropriate time, but the motion that is on the floor has to be dealt with.

THE CHAIR: That would be my take on it as well, and to make another motion is not in order when there is a motion on the floor, but you can always make an amendment to it. So with the concurrence of a former Speaker, we will proceed with the vote on the motion as put forward.

The question has been called. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Have we handled all of the motions that were to come forward?

STEVE WESSEL: Mr. Chairman, if I might. Mr. Scott, you made the motion with regard to the signage on the Memorial Highway. That was the only portion of the presentation that was made in April, the additional portion was the second item with regard to the upgrading of the Miller Lake signage, to bring it up to standards with the Truro sign. I was wondering if maybe a motion was going to be proposed with regard to that?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Kent wants to speak to that - and I knew you would keep us on track with all of your requests.

BECKY KENT: Thank you. Originally I wasn't sure if that was going to be captured in the consideration of that. I think first of all I want to commend and congratulate the efforts of the branch that did that. I think that it certainly is a fitting

tribute, it's beautiful. I should note, though, without full knowledge of the location that there was probably a significant amount of already landscaped area around it, the implications of doing that one might be a little less than this one, which seems to be stuck in the middle of a highway with perhaps more of a challenge, but I think that it certainly is a good idea.

What I would do at this point is ask that further to the motion that we put forward regarding calling upon the minister to consult with our guests, that we ask the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal to begin dialogue around the issue of the upgrade to that large sign in the Miller Lake area for consideration.

THE CHAIR: You've heard the motion. It has been moved and seconded. The question has been called. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Have we dealt, in one way or another, with all of the concerns that you have put forward this morning?

LES NASH: You've done them all.

THE CHAIR: We have a couple of items of business to deal with, and you are most welcome to stay, but would you like to make a couple of brief closing comments?

LES NASH: Mr. Chairman, it's also my first time at the meetings. My colleagues have been here before and they tried to bring me up to date before we came. However, it's been a learning experience and I do want to thank you and your committee members for allowing us to come here and make our presentations. I guess now all I can do - I've seen the results of our motions and I hope that you can convince our government of being in favour of them. With that, thank you for allowing us to be here.

THE CHAIR: Well thank you so much for coming, all five of you. The amount of good content in your presentations was really something else.

This Veterans Affairs Committee has agreed to meet much more regularly than has been the case in the past; in some years, the committee has met only twice. We are looking at a monthly meeting, or at least nine or ten meetings a years, so that's a departure from what has taken place. So there will be more follow-up in relationship to motions that have come forward and so on. You can expect responses, I believe, in better fashion through what this committee has agreed to do. So thank you very much for coming here today. You're most welcome to stay for the remaining discussion, if you would like.

We have a brief presentation in the form of a resolution, which is something that

hasn't come before the committee, I'm told, and I have to compliment Mr. Burrill for doing that, for putting together the resolution to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. Rather than going through all the "Whereases", I'm wondering if he would perhaps just comment a little bit on the background and perhaps read the "therefore" to us. If you could just go into a little bit of background in relationship to this. It's something that the entire House has dealt with, I guess, at one time.

GARY BURRILL: Yes, and maybe the best way to begin thinking about this would be to just briefly read the resolution that was unanimously adopted by the House three years ago. It reads:

"Whereas the Canada Pension Plan was enacted in 1965, with the intention of providing another source of income security to our seniors; and

Whereas the veterans of our military and Royal Canadian Mounted Police deserve the same rights and privileges that all retired people are offered; and

Whereas the Military and RCMP Pensioners Against Benefit Reduction mission is to have members of Parliament initiate action to terminate the pension reduction formula that is applied to benefits of these Veterans;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House of Assembly encourage the Government of Canada to investigate this matter immediately and end the unfair policy of benefit reduction to our veterans of the military and the RCMP."

The resolution makes clear that the matter of what is known widely in the military world as the pension clawback is a matter of great importance to veterans' organizations, not only the Legion but also the organizations that are listed here in the second Whereas clause, which have been in support of the federal initiative that would have brought to an end the current process by which Canadian Forces members, on receipt of Canada Pension benefits, have their pensions reduced to that extent from their military pension.

I think the issue itself is quite well known, but this resolution is timely because it was only last week that this initiative to have this discrimination ended came as far as it has yet come in the House of Commons - to the realization it was received through first and second reading and advanced to the clause-by-clause stage last week.

I'll also add a little bit of information to what is available in today's ChronicleHerald, which includes a letter to the editor speaking critically of those Liberal members who did not, at the clause by clause stage, support the continuing to third reading of the bill. I want to say also - and it isn't mentioned in the paper - that Scott Andrews, a Newfoundland and Labrador MP in association with the Liberal Party, did support the bill at clause by clause reading, but as a result of the fact that he was the only one of the Liberal Party members of the committee, the bill was defeated at the clause by clause stage.

This resolution asks us to express regret about this and to urge the Government of Canada to re-examine the merits of the proposal that was contained within Bill C-201. Shall I perhaps read the exact words, for the record, of the therefore be it resolved?

THE CHAIR: Just for the therefore.

GARY BURRILL: Therefore be it resolved that the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly expresses its regret that all the clauses of Bill C-201 were defeated at committee and urges the Government of Canada to re-examine the merits of the proposal contained within the bill.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. So this would actually be a motion that is accepting the resolution as presented and taking the appropriate action as outlined in the therefore.

BECKY KENT: I just have a question about what happens, - and thank you, Gary, for bringing this forward - what happens with this after. Is it a request that goes to . . .

THE CHAIR: The chairman will be involved with the clerk in writing a letter and attaching the . . .

BECKY KENT: And that letter would come from the committee or are we asking government to . . .

THE CHAIR: I believe that it would come from the chairman of the committee, representing the committee, it would be coming from the committee through the chairman.

BECKY KENT: Okay, thank you.

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

The motion is carried.

I would like to personally, as chairman, commend Mr. Burrill for doing the research on this, for taking the initiative to bring this forward. These kinds of things make this committee a better committee and one that is responding to the needs of the veterans in Nova Scotia and that's what we're all about. I commend all members of this committee for the way the meeting has been handled today, and our previous meeting, in relation to how we go forward and the fact that we have agreed to be a more aggressive committee than has ever existed in the past, in Nova Scotia. I certainly appreciate that - aggressive in the fact that we're going to be here more often as a committee.

We have a letter that has come forward, that has been put before you from Ron Griffis, outlining some of the potential people who could come before the committee. I think we should consider this. We have the January and February meeting, I think, pretty well lined up in relationship to Veterans Affairs will be coming to our next meeting. It was suggested that reservists be involved in the meeting that is to be held in February.

I think we should look at the content of Mr. Griffis's letter in future meetings. Is that agreeable? We would also like to give the clerk the authority to come up with the proper person for the reservist's end of a presentation. The name that has been suggested is one that is not available, or perhaps is not the person who should be coming? Is it agreed that we consider Mr. Griffis's letter for future meetings and that we give the clerk the authority to proceed with getting the proper person for reservists.

Is there any further business to come before the committee? Our next meeting date has been set for January 14<sup>th</sup> from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. As stated previously, Veterans Affairs Canada will be coming before us.

I'm certainly open to comments on future witnesses to appear before the committee or are we okay with the next two and looking at others down the road? We're okay? We are 11:00 a.m. right on, I commend all of you for the way you have handled this meeting this morning and a motion to adjourn would be in order. Thank you.