

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Thursday, March 11, 2010

Committee Room 1

Canadian Naval Centennial/Last Post Fund

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VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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Alfie MacLeod
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[Clarrie MacKinnon was replaced by Mat Whynott.]

In Attendance:

Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

Captain (Navy) Craig Walkington, Coordinator,
MARLANT Canadian Naval Centennial Project

Rear-Admiral (retired) Barry Keeler, President,
Last Post Fund - Nova Scotia Branch



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, MARCH 11, 2010

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIR

Clarrie MacKinnon

THE CHAIR: I want to welcome Captain (Navy) Craig Walkington this morning to speak to us about the Canadian Navy Centennial. I feel like saying, Captain Walkington, that we should say that we hope you enjoyed the month off that we gave you since your last presentation here, when you were part of the group that was speaking to us about reserves. We look forward to thinking together with you about the matters of the Centennial.

Because we are not exactly the same group we were when you were here before, maybe we'll just, beginning with Mr. Prest, say who we are and where we come from.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: We'll give you the floor.

CAPTAIN (NAVY) CRAIG WALKINGTON: Great, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Once again it is my pleasure to be before the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. This morning my presentation is going to be on the Maritime Forces Atlantic, Canadian Navy Centennial plans. I will go through my presentation, you do have a copy of it in your folder and there is also some other material in there for your further reading pleasure.

The purpose of my brief this morning is to give you an overview of what Maritime Forces Atlantic will be doing during the centennial year. To set it in context, I am also going to be covering what we've done in the past to mark significant naval anniversaries, what we did last year as a lead-in and, more importantly, what we're going to be doing in 2010.

The theme of the Canadian Navy Centennial is to bring the Navy to Canadians. We've realized that many Canadians suffer from what we call Maritime blindness, in that they don't understand why Canada needs a robust Navy, why a strong Navy is critical to Canadians' way of life. As such, we intend to use the Canadian Navy Centennial as our vehicle by which to inform Canadians why a Navy is important to them.

The slogan of the centennial is, Commemorate, Celebrate, Commit. We wish to commemorate our great history and our achievements. A lot of Canadians don't realize that by the end of World War II we were the third largest Navy in the world. We want to celebrate who we are today, that pound for pound or ton for ton we are probably the best Navy in the world, internationally respected for what we bring to the table, a highly professional Navy and we wish to commit back to Canadians to demonstrate that we are on duty for Canada.

Everything that we do during our centennial year, our activities, our themes, will relate back to our slogan and to the main theme, which is to bring the Navy to Canadians.

Briefly in this section, I'd like to cover what we've done in our past anniversary activities. One which directly relates to the Province of Nova Scotia, for our 50th Anniversary in 1960, the Province of Nova Scotia kindly presented to the Navy nine ceremonial sterling silver drums. These drums are highly valuable and highly valued by the Navy, they are sterling silver and they're engraved with the names of all Canadian warships that were lost during World War II. As I say, the Navy highly values them and as such they are on display, but in a very secure lockup in Juno Tower at CFB Halifax.

Other things that we've done in the past during our anniversaries, we've done things such as commemorative stamps, stained glass windows, of course, giant birthday cakes as you see on this, cross-country runs. Some of those themes will be repeated in 2010.

One key aspect which we've done is Naval Assemblies. A traditional way of marking a significant naval anniversary is to conduct a Naval Assembly where we invite Navies of the world to come to a specific location to join us in our celebrations. I'll be going more into what we'll be doing in 2010, but in this slide you'll see in the upper left-hand corner the 75th Anniversary of the Navy in 1985, you'll see then-Governor General Jeanne Sauvé wearing naval uniform, the Admiral at the time, Admiral Jim Wood and accompanying them was His Royal Highness Prince Andrew. In the top right-hand corner you will see the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust, HMCS Sackville and then in the bottom picture you'll see actually the Naval Assembly that was conducted in 1967, to celebrate Canada's Centenary.

In this section I'd like to briefly cover what we have done in 2009, although the actual anniversary is in 2010, we conducted two major events as lead-in to that celebration and I'll briefly describe them now.

The first event was the consecration and presentation of a replacement Queen's Colour to the Navy and this event was conducted on June 27, 2009. The old colour which was presented by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, Queen Mother, in June 1979, was falling apart and we felt it had to be replaced so that we could use the new one during our Centenary Year, this year. We conducted a ceremony on the Garrison Grounds exactly 30 years to the date from our last ceremony.

The Governor General presided over this event and it was the first time that she wore a Canadian Forces uniform and the Navy was particularly proud in that she chose to wear a naval uniform for her first outing in a uniform. The old colour was laid up at the Hall of Colours at Beechwood ceremony in Ottawa on October 21st.

The next ceremony was conducted during Tall Ships 2009 and it was done to recognize the founding of the Naval Dockyard in Halifax in 1759. Essentially, we did a re-enactment to the founding where we had 300 re-enactors come to Halifax, row down the harbour and come ashore at Bishop's Landing, where we did a re-enactment where a retired Vice-Admiral in real life, Dusty Miller, presented a telescope to the current Admiral. The Admiral that was played by Dusty Miller was the founding Admiral, Rear Admiral Philip Durell and he presented a telescope to the current Admiral and the telescope is engraved with the words, A Clear View of the Past - A Clear View of the Future. The idea was to connect our history of our founding to where we are today.

Now what I'd like to cover is the most important part which you'd like to hear, which is what we intend to do in 2010. There are a number of national activities that are being conducted that will also involve Maritime Forces Atlantic and the first one is the Stadacona Band Road Show. Essentially, the Stadacona Band will present 27 concerts around the Atlantic Provinces, Québec and Ontario. This concert will be entitled Sailors and Songs - A Musical Tribute to 100 Years of Naval Service.

Insofar as Nova Scotia is concerned, the first concert is down at Cornwallis at the Admiral Desmond Piers Theatre on April 25th, the one in Halifax will be on April 26th, at the Rebecca Cohn Theatre. Our next one is on May 23rd in Canso at Canso Academy and then the final concert in Nova Scotia will be on July 31st in Sydney and that will be done on the boardwalk. So this is about a two-hour concert which will cover 100 years of music and I think it will be an enjoyable event. Our counterpart, Maritime Forces Pacific, their band, the Naden Band will be doing a similar series of concerts, moving from Victoria to Ontario.

The next major project on a national basis is the Centennial Bell and we cast a bell in September 2009 and this bell was made up of brass, but also committed to the casting process were artifacts from 100 years of the Canadian Navy. They were put in, and of course, they would just evaporate, disappear in the casting process, but it makes the bell more symbolic. This bell will be unveiled on Parliament Hill on May 4, 2010, and will be hung in Parliament for one year.

Leading up to that event, we held a bell rope competition which essentially had sailors design and make a bell rope that will hang. This is a sailor's tradition to make bell ropes and the designs that were developed were extremely elaborate and the competition was quite tough to select the final one.

The next aspect is what we call the Bell Waters Project. We collected waters from six areas around Canada and internationally, being the Atlantic, the Arctic, the Pacific, the St. Lawrence, the Great Lakes and we collected water from the Indian Ocean to symbolize that Canada's Navy is not only a Navy which operates in our coastal areas and inland, but also internationally. Those waters will be brought to Halifax, blessed in a ceremony on HMCS Sackville on April 30th, then transported to Ottawa and poured into the bell on May 4th.

[9:15 a.m.]

Our final national project is the presentation of namesake city plaques. Throughout the 100 years, over 320 ships have been named after cities and municipalities across Canada. In order to bring the Navy to Canadians, we have decided to present a plaque to each one of those municipalities and the plaque is made up of a photograph, a description and the ship's badge. Essentially, 90 will be assigned to Maritime Forces Atlantic in 54 locations, that takes into account the amalgamation around Halifax and Cape Breton Regional Municipality. Of course, our namesake ships that exist now such as HMCS Halifax, those crews will present to HRM. What we're trying to do is bring sailors from those hometowns to present in their hometowns, so it becomes very personal.

The first event of the year was a flag raising at City Hall where we raised the Navy Centennial Flag, which is shown in this slide. The histories of the Navy and Halifax are inextricably intertwined and you cannot separate them. We've grown together and we thought that it would be highly symbolic to raise our flag at City Hall on January 1st.

The next event was the unveiling of the William Hall, VC, commemorative stamp. Canada Post decided to issue a commemorative stamp to honour William Hall, who was the first man of colour, the first Nova Scotian and the first Canadian sailor to win the Victoria Cross, the Commonwealth's highest honour. So we were very pleased to do this on February 2nd at the Black Cultural Centre.

The next big event will be the granting of the Freedom of the City to the Canadian Navy by the Halifax Regional Municipality. Just to give you a little bit of background information on what Freedom of the City means, essentially it is akin to being given the key to the city. It stems from Roman times where there was concern that army regiments could potentially overthrow the city state so they were banned from being in the city unless they were granted specific permission. What this allows a military unit to do is to march through the streets with drums beating, flags flying and bayonets fixed. So it's a highly symbolic event. It is a demonstration of trust and respect to the military unit but

also draws a very direct link between the municipality and the unit that is being granted it.

The concept is that we will conduct this on the 4th of May, which is the Canadian Navy's actual anniversary, on the Grand Parade on Tuesday at 10 o'clock. We intend to march 1,000 sailors through the streets of Halifax. We'll likely create havoc by tying up traffic but the City of Halifax will know that the Navy is here.

We will be doing that also at other cities across the country, in particular in Victoria. This will be part of our national strategic messaging that an important institution in Canada is celebrating its 100th Anniversary. It also reaffirms the very close relationship between Maritime Forces Atlantic and the Halifax Regional Municipality. This will be witnessed by the mayor, council and other citizens and the mayor will also proclaim Navy Centennial Day.

It is my understanding that the Cape Breton Regional Municipality is also considering granting Freedom of the City to the Navy the following weekend and we are currently in negotiations to work out the details of that. In addition, we will be placing HMCS Toronto on the waterfront and this is part of putting a Navy ship into the heart of Halifax so that Canadians can see their Navy. In addition, we'll be doing an enrolment ceremony on Toronto that day and it is symbolic more than substantive, the idea being that these new enrollees will be the sailors of the next century.

The biggest event will be the International Fleet Review Week, which will be conducted from the 28th of June to the 2nd of July. We issued invitations to over 30 nations to attend. Eight have responded and we forecast that there will be approximately 5,000 to 7,000 sailors descending on Halifax during that time frame. What we're doing is we are working to produce an event that is memorable. Halifax and Nova Scotia have an international reputation as being a place to visit by sailors. It is probably the best port of call on the Eastern Seaboard, if not the world, so we know that these sailors are looking forward to coming to Halifax.

The other aspect is that the American Bus Association, which basically looks after all bus tours and they figuratively and literally drive tourists to various quarters of North America based on what they perceive to be important events, has declared the Halifax International Fleet Review the top Canadian event in 2010. That, in itself, will draw a significant number of tourists to Halifax, not only during that time frame but throughout the summer. In addition, a number of naval associations are conducting their national reunions during that time frame so Halifax is going to be the place to be during that week.

More details - this slide just breaks down which nations are coming and how many ships they are going to send. The following slide actually lists the ships. I won't read them, in the interest of time. The following slides illustrate which ships are actually coming. The United States is sending at least six ships, the largest one being the USS Wasp. The United Kingdom is sending at least five ships, the largest being the HMS Ark

Royal. Denmark is sending its newest vessel. The Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 will be sending at least five ships and, of course, we have the participants from Canada, which will include our destroyers, our frigates, our Maritime Coastal Defence vessels and submarines.

This slide basically shows you how the latter part of June is going to unfold. As a means to, I guess, entice other nations and other navies to come to Halifax, we are laying on an international fleet exercise in the preceding two weeks and it will conclude in Halifax. That exercise is called Halcyon RV. Essentially the ships will start arriving in Halifax on the 23rd of June and stay until the 2nd of July. On this slide, you will see that we have a fairly robust program of sports and culture. The ships will be open for tours, there will be a welcome ceremony to our visiting VIP. We will also be doing an actual fleet review itself on Tuesday, June 29th in the afternoon. I will be talking more on that in a few moments.

How a fleet review is typically conducted is that the visiting ships will go to anchor and the VIP will board a reviewing vessel and sail up and down the lines to receive salutes from the other ships. In this slide here you see two charts; on the left-hand side you see the Bedford Basin and each one of those squares represents a ship and the route that the reviewing vessel will take up and down the lines.

The review will conclude in Halifax Harbour itself and work its way down around Georges Island. Part of that will be a multi-national flypast of Canadian and visiting Navies' aircraft, including F-18s, Sea Kings, Auroras. We'll have a vintage wings component where two historic aircraft will fly over and then the Snow Birds will also do a 13-minute demonstration over Halifax Harbour. So we're going to have this spectacle in three dimensions in Halifax Harbour - the fleet reviewing vessel coming down the harbour, surrounded by fire tugs shooting water and an air display in the air. I think we are giving Haligonians and the visitors, as well as Nova Scotians, something to see that they have not seen in at least 25 years and probably won't see for at least another 25 years.

Next here in my presentation, I want to briefly cover the community partnerships that we are developing or have developed. This is a realization that we can't do this celebration on our own so we need the assistance and support of other organizations but we also have had other organizations come to us saying this is significant, we would like to be part of it, so this part of my briefing will briefly discuss that.

The first one is the Mayor's Community Service Pin. This is just a prototype of what the pin could look like. It will have some sort of 100 year marking on it. Essentially it is the Mayor of Halifax's way of engaging volunteer work and it will be awarded for every 100 hours of voluntary service.

The next one is planting an oak tree in the Public Gardens by the Commander of Maritime Forces Atlantic, Rear-Admiral Paul Maddison.

Our next is partnering between the Stadacona Band and Symphony Nova Scotia for the Beer and Beethoven concert. We did this last year in 2009 and we'll be doing it again at the CFB Halifax drill shed, from the 7th to the 8th of May this year. That's a great concert, I urge everybody to get to that.

We'll be displaying banners on the bridge and in downtown Halifax.

My next slide discusses our participation and partnering with the Abilities Foundation of Nova Scotia, otherwise known as Easter Seals. You may be aware of the public art project that they do every two or three years. In the past it has been lobsters and figureheads and, as a tribute to the Navy, they decided to use the dolphin. Dolphins have a significance to sailors, so they declared that the dolphin would be the public art project. In this slide you see, in the bottom right-hand corner, the unveiling of the first dolphin in October 2008, which essentially featured the Navy's dolphin. This has been immensely successful in partnering with them to get our message out, but also to generate sponsorship of the Easter Seals by various organizations and corporations.

Our next project is Centennial Flower Gardens. The Bridge Commission has agreed to put one as you come off the MacKay Bridge and there will be a Centennial Flower Garden in the Public Gardens.

The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia have agreed to curate an exhibit focused around the Navy and that will run from May 1st to July 16th, at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.

Of course, who can forget the Royal Nova Scotia International Tattoo and they will be featuring a celebration of the Canadian Navy's 100 years as part of their theme.

The Navy owns a sail training vessel called Tuna and we purchased a spinnaker for it which is emblazoned with the Navy's Centennial logo and will be participating in various races and regattas up and down the Eastern Seaboard, displaying our spinnaker.

This concludes my briefing, ladies and gentlemen. You may wonder who this gentleman is in this slide. That is Rear Admiral Charles Kingsmill who is the founder of the Canadian Navy, born in Guelph, Ontario, went to the United Kingdom, joined the Royal Navy and then came back to Canada to found the Canadian Navy.

THE CHAIR: Thanks so much for this thorough explanation of the celebration. Before we turn to responses and questions I want to acknowledge that Mr. MacMaster is part of the meeting, the MLA for Inverness. We are open for responses to the Naval Centennial.

Mr. MacLeod.

ALFIE MACLEOD: Thank you, Captain for your presentation, it was very

informative. I guess I want to make a statement more than I want to ask a question, but I just want you to take back, on behalf of our caucus and I'm sure everybody here, our thanks to the people who do wear the uniform and for the work that you do. Although you're celebrating 100 years, the impact that the Armed Forces has had on Atlantic Canada, when you think of our segment of the population in Canada yet the number of people who are members of the Forces, it is truly a strong calling to public service that people here believe in and it is only right that we would be celebrating it in such a way here in Halifax.

I certainly want to thank everybody that wears the uniform for what they do and how they do it because they do Canada proud, so I just wanted to say thank you.

CRAIG WALKINGTON: Thank you, Mr. MacLeod. Your statement and sentiments are greatly appreciated by the Navy and the Canadian Forces.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Whynott.

[9:30 a.m.]

MAT WHYNOTT: Thank you for coming and I, too, wanted to say the exact same thing Mr. MacLeod said. One of the things that I always try to do when I keep in touch with my constituents and I'm out knocking door to door, whenever I see a veterans plate on someone's car I always say, is there a veteran in your house, did you serve and I always say thank you to them because it's one of those important things to do. All Nova Scotians are proud to have Canada's East Coast Navy here in our province.

Also, something interesting you noted about William Hall and the stamp that was unveiled. I have a fairly large African Nova Scotian community in the constituency that I represent and during African Heritage Month, they certainly had a sense of pride at that unveiling of the stamp. I participated in a few events at the Black Cultural Centre and also a couple of events in my riding and they were very proud to see that stamp unveiled to celebrate the Centennial.

Just a few quick questions. What sort of things is the Navy doing to encourage normal, everyday Nova Scotians, who may not necessarily be in the HRM, maybe down in the Valley or the South Shore, to come to Halifax to take part in the festivities?

CRAIG WALKINGTON: Part of our main activity is spreading the word as much as possible and at opportunities such as this to describe our activities so that people are informed. We are trying to spread as many activities throughout the Province of Nova Scotia as possible, however, we are constrained by personnel and resources. The Navy has not downed tools to celebrate. We still have one ship operating in Haiti, we have one ship operating off the Horn of Africa from the East Coast, HMCS Fredericton, so we're trying to do as much as possible.

Around the weekend of April 24th and 25th, the Desmond Piers Naval Association are having a reunion and we'll be supporting that by doing a tree planting as well as our concert that weekend. We are having Navy Day in Sydney on May 8th, and, of course, I did mention the concerts. We're trying to get as much out of the Halifax area as possible, but as I say, we're constrained by resources and personnel.

MAT WHYNOTT: Maybe to spread some information around, I know a lot of members of the Legislature, even Members of Parliament have an opportunity in their local papers to write articles. There might be an opportunity there to spread some information from our behalf to the public to encourage people to take in some of the celebrations. What sort of communications are you having with the Legions with regard to these celebrations, any at all?

CRAIG WALKINGTON: We are working as much as possible with the Legions. Our focus with veterans groups tends to be around the Naval Associations in particular, however, we are trying to connect as much as possible into the Legions so that they are aware of our activities. Any event that we do we try to have three components to it. One is our present-day serving sailors, our other group is veterans and the other is youth represented by Sea Cadets and Navy League Cadets. This speaks back to our theme of Commemorate, Celebrate and Commit. So at the Granting of the Freedom of the City ceremony, those three groups will be on parade.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Raymond.

MICHELE RAYMOND: Thank you very much, I'm so pleased to be seeing this and particularly sort of following on last year's celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the Dockyard, I think we all realize that we just wouldn't be here were it not for the Port of Halifax and the fact that it is such a beautiful harbour that encouraged the Navy to come here and the Canadian Navy took up that role 100 years ago. I just wanted to thank you for all of the work that you're doing and also to bring this sort of into public consciousness a little bit more. We tend to forget that there is this *raison d'être* for the city that continues to function behind.

I was saddened yesterday to be at the funeral of Commander Law's widow. I don't know if you knew Commander Law, but, of course, he was a naval painter who really brought the art of the Canadian Navy to public consciousness, a much wider consciousness and has been a very important figure in this and I imagine he'll be well represented in this. I was pleased when talking to people at the funeral yesterday to know that the museum at the Dockyard is actually getting a little bit of rejuvenation and so on. I was wondering whether there will be any special exhibits and any sort of more general opening of the Admiralty House museum in commemoration of the Naval Centenary? Are there any plans that way?

CRAIG WALKINGTON: I cannot speak specifically to what the schedule will be for the Maritime Command Museum. It certainly will be running its normal minimum, its

normal operating hours. It is a great museum, the artifacts in there are phenomenal in what they contain and most recently they unveiled a bell exhibit, which is just amazing to see.

We are trying to negotiate a number of exhibits around the HRM area. I am trying to see if we can actually have a naval exhibit in Province House and we're trying to get a naval exhibit into Government House also and into City Hall, so that we have something that Canadians can see when they visit those three buildings.

MICHELE RAYMOND: Well, I hope that happens but I do really hope that this will be an occasion to open the Maritime Command Museum a little bit more and to make people more aware of it because, as you say, it is a remarkable museum and I think people in Halifax tend to just sort of see that wall on Gottingen Street and think there's . .

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CRAIG WALKINGTON: Nothing behind it.

MICHELE RAYMOND: . . . nothing behind it, yes.

CRAIG WALKINGTON: Yes, Ms. Raymond, I will take that point back, that we need to ensure that we publicize it and make it available. I also want to put out to all MLAs that we are happy to provide you information that if you want to distribute to your constituents information on the Canadian Navy Centennial, we are more than happy to provide that to you. Part of my role as the coordinator is to provide information to the public and to influential Canadians because we have had a number who have said, how can we help, so we're glad to provide that.

We also have a very good Web site which is www.canadiannavy100.forces.gc.ca. If you are interested in putting that as a link on to your own Web site, then we're happy to do that.

MICHELE RAYMOND: Okay, can I ask another quick question? It is about the Convoy Cup. Now, is the course fixed for that, do you know yet, that race?

CRAIG WALKINGTON: I don't have enough information on the Convoy Cup at this stage because it's really outside of the Navy's planning so I can't really comment on what they do.

MICHELE RAYMOND: I might ask you about getting in touch with somebody about that particular thing. Another piece that we have, of course, is the oldest lighthouse in the Americas which, of course, was built to mark the entrance to the Port of Halifax. That, of course, is Sambro light. I hope that is something that can be - I've been working on trying to get that commemorated as well. Anyway, I might ask you later.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Prest.

SIDNEY PREST: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Do you still have Dependants Day? Are you aware what I'm talking about?

CRAIG WALKINGTON: If I'm correct, are you referring to when families go onboard ships and we take them out to sea or into the Bedford Basin?

SIDNEY PREST: Back in the 1980s, I sailed on the Iroquois but it was only for two hours one afternoon. It was very enjoyable and we were invited in, a beautiful day off the coast, east and west. It was really something that families - you know I think I had my son and daughter with me at the time and it really gave them a great sense of what it was about. I often wondered if that still takes place from time to time.

CRAIG WALKINGTON: Absolutely, Mr. Prest. The leadership of the Navy fully understand that the Navy family is not just the sailors, it includes our civilian workforce but it also includes the families of sailors. So we have really stepped up our activities to ensure that we look after sailors' families but also include them as much as possible.

Yes, we do have programs where we get families out to sea, to show them what their parents are doing. In some cases mother and father are both in the Navy.

THE CHAIR: Capt. Walkington, a tiny question and a general comment. My tiny question is - pardon my ignorance - what is a spinnaker?

CRAIG WALKINGTON: Basically a spinnaker - and I'm not a sailor so I must confess I am - essentially it . . .

THE CHAIR: What does it look like? (Laughter)

CRAIG WALKINGTON: Well, if I can refer back to - in the slide that's the very large sail which is on the boat on the right-hand side. Essentially, if I'm correct and I may be wrong, sir . . .

THE CHAIR: You could have told me anything. (Laughter)

CRAIG WALKINGTON: It is typically used when the winds are strong enough. It is basically a boost for sailing. I'm sorry, I wish I could answer it more than that but I'm a sailor on grey vessels, as opposed to sail boats.

THE CHAIR: No, you spoke of it, I just felt it was something that a person was supposed to know so I thought I had better ask.

I wanted to just say, not about this celebration but about the Navy's place in the public heart, most MLAs in the last series of weeks would have in their communities taken part in various kinds of fundraising efforts to do with Haitian relief. In the course of

this, I certainly have felt - and I have spoken to others who have felt, too - the great collective registering of pride through our Navy that in this current mission, Canada's international role has been one of this kind of service. I think this is something that has been registered very widely across the province. I'd like to just take this chance to impart a sense of that to you. I am sure others would have had similar experiences.

Are there other responses to the material that Capt. Walkington has presented to us?

Well, if not, we thank you very much for coming in, explaining this to us and giving us a picture of all the symbolism especially, that is involved. Is there a last word about it that you'd like to kind of leave us with?

CRAIG WALKINGTON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess I would like to conclude by two points. One is, thank you for this opportunity to present today. As I said, it is part of my mandate to spread the word, but I also want to leave you with the message again that we are prepared to provide whatever information we can to the committee and to MLAs on the Navy centennial so that they can take it to their constituents.

If I can add one final point, the Canadian Navy greatly appreciates the support that is provided by the Province of Nova Scotia. We know that you have our back. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Will we take five minutes to reconvene the next meeting?

[9:45 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[9:52 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: We want to welcome this morning Rear-Admiral (retired) Barry Keeler to the meeting of our Veterans Affairs Committee. Mr. Keeler is going to present to us about the work of the Last Post Fund and its mission, now in its 101st year. Perhaps before we ask you to present the material, Mr. Keeler, we could just introduce ourselves to you. If we could begin, Ms. Raymond with you and the place you represent.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: So we'd be open to your presentation, Mr. Keeler.

REAR-ADMIRAL (RETIRED) BARRY KEELER: Mr. Chairman, madames and gentlemen, I relish the opportunity to speak with groups such as this on veterans matters and I thank you for the opportunity and also thank you for inviting me here and I'd like to thank Kim for getting me to the right place on time and passing out a copy of my presentation.

In speaking to you on the Last Post Fund, by way of background, I am a retired naval officer and at present I spend a lot of time doing volunteer work. I am the President of the Last Post Fund, Nova Scotia Branch, and I am also the National Treasurer. I am involved in some other organizations so I enjoy working with veterans and I particularly welcome this opportunity, as I said.

What I'd like to do is give you a brief history of the Last Post Fund and then focus a little bit on the funeral and burial program. I notice you people all have a copy of my canned presentation so I'm not going to dwell on it because I think we could get a bigger bang for the buck if we engage in some dialogue in terms of questions and answers.

The Last Post Fund, as was alluded to, we celebrated our 100th Anniversary last year and on that note I would like to thank the Government of Nova Scotia for passing a resolution recognizing the important work that the Last Post Fund has done over the 100 years and also thank them for the signage that was erected on Veterans Memorial Highway. You may have noticed that under the veterans signs there is reference to the Last Post Fund. We deeply appreciate that and I think that gives a lot of positive publicity.

It is an interesting history. It all started back in December 1908 when two policemen in Montreal found a destitute man huddled in the doorway of a downtown Montreal area. He was unconscious and he was taken to the Montreal General Hospital where he was quickly diagnosed as purportedly being inebriated and he was sent off to another room to sleep it off.

While this so-called drunk was being wheeled away, the head orderly, who was a chap by the name of Arthur Hair, who himself was a veteran of the South African War, he was the head orderly at the Montreal Hospital and he noticed a blue envelope protruding from the man's coat pocket. He discovered that they were his discharge papers from his service, he did 21 years in the British Army, in the Dragoon Guards. He detected the fact that he was a veteran and later it was determined that his name was Private Daley, that Daley was not inebriated, he was suffering from severe exhaustion and malnutrition and he died two days later.

Mr. Hair thought it would be just dreadful if Daley was hauled off to a paupers' field and forgotten thereafter and he and his colleagues took up a bit of a collection and ensured that Daley was not relegated to a paupers' field, that he was given a dignified funeral and burial. To this day there have been some 145,000 veterans - Daley being the first one - that have been, in fact, assisted by the Last Post Fund of Canada.

Primarily, the Last Post Fund was focused from 1909 until 1922 in Montreal. In 1922, as a result of mobilization from World War I, there were a lot of veterans who were looking for work and not doing very well. The federal government at that time recognized that maybe they had a role to play and rightfully so and they said to the Last Post Fund, you have some experience doing this type of work would you be willing, with some

financial assistance from us on an annual basis, to perform that work across Canada and that's the genesis of how we now have branches across Canada to serve all of our provinces.

In essence, what we are; that's our mission, straightforward. We are a non-profit organization and we deliver the Funeral and Burial Program on behalf of Veterans Affairs Canada. We have a number of volunteers, we have volunteer boards of directors across the country - I'm a volunteer, as I mentioned. We also have 30 paid employees who look after and process the applications in offices across Canada. We have a Nova Scotia office here in Halifax located on Chebucto Road where we have three employees. In addition, we have a head office in Montreal, where we have five or six people, where we have a paid executive director who runs the operation as it were.

So getting into the Funeral and Burial Program, I'll just very quickly cover these points here. You can see that we have to adhere to the veterans regulations that are put out by Veterans Affairs. To qualify for the Funeral and Burial Program, first of all the person had to be in the service, we have to determine that and once that is determined, there's a financial means test that one goes through.

[10:00 a.m.]

Here are the folks that are eligible for the program. Veterans of World War I - as you know, Mr. Babcock was the last survivor and he passed on about three weeks ago at Spokane, Washington, at the age of 106. We have about 163,000 veterans left from World War II and there are about 17,000 from the Korean War. We also look after Merchant Navy and some allied folks.

In determining the eligibility, if a veteran dies as a result of his military service, we consider that a matter-of-right case and that individual's expenses are automatically paid up, there's no means test, so that's a good thing. In terms of the matter of right, he must be in receipt of a Veterans Affairs Disability Benefit and the death must be related to that disability for him to qualify for assistance and no means test.

The means test is driven by marital status, the number of dependents and net assets, it's very straightforward. They simply look at a person's assets, minus their liabilities and if their assets exceed \$12,000, they're not eligible. That's a pretty low threshold, as you can imagine, but it's not as bad as it looks because you can extract a person's home and their automobile and pensions they received during the particular month of death and the liabilities can include the cost of the funeral.

So a lot of people say gosh, that's a low threshold - and it is low, it used to be \$24,000 until the mid-1990s when Paul Martin was Minister of Finance and we were going to hit the wall, the government was cut back severely, as you'll recall. That particular amount has not been reinstated. We can talk a little bit more about that later because you people may be able to use some of your influence.

In terms of the single veteran it's a little bit different, they simply look at all of his assets and if he's got any money left over, he has to pay for his own funeral and burial. Feel free to jump in if you have any questions. We have kind of two cases . . .

THE CHAIR: Would it be all right to ask a question about the net assets matter?

BARRY KEELER: Sure, by all means.

THE CHAIR: In my vocation as a minister in the United Church, I've not rarely helped families access the fund at the time of a veteran's death. One thing that has always puzzled me is the means test and the calculation of assets, particularly from the point of view of land. As you know, particularly in rural Nova Scotia, it is quite common for families of low income to own land. My experience has been that benefits have been available to the estates of families that seemed to me of modest mid-range income, but on other occasions not available to the estates of veterans who it was apparent were of quite low income, but who owned land. In your view is it possible as the net asset criteria are set up now for that kind of an imbalance to happen?

BARRY KEELER: Yes, it would be because the value of that land, of course, would be considered an asset, rightly or wrongly. It's quite simple, assets minus liability equal capital. That's not a good answer. I've never heard of that being a problem, but you're perhaps closer to the grieving families in that scenario. It is something I would be glad to look at. I guess one could turn that around and say if the person has land maybe they should sell it, what purpose is the land serving to them.

THE CHAIR: Yet it's pretty widely recognized that ownership of land within a family over multiple generations, it's not as all rare that that can co-exist with poverty. It has occurred to me when I've been helping people access the fund that this might be a consideration that would be meaningful to give some thought to, so I'd just like to register that.

BARRY KEELER: No, I think that's a valid point and I would be glad to pursue it. I haven't heard of any cases where that has been problematic, but you have and I thank you for bringing that to our attention.

THE CHAIR: I just thought I would mention it when you were right at that stage of the material. Thank you.

BARRY KEELER: Basically we have two types of service that we provide, the grieving family comes at the time of death and there's a quick determination made whether or not they're eligible for the program and if they are the Last Post Fund will gladly make all of the arrangements for them with the funeral home and that's pretty straightforward.

The next case involves one of the biggest challenges, of course, is getting the word out, marketing the program and ensuring that people that are eligible are aware of the program's existence. In some cases, that is not the case and they discover later that gosh, maybe we would have been eligible for some assistance under the Last Post Fund, so they have up to a year to come to us and make application. We're trying to have that year stipulation extended. So those are the two types of service that we provide.

To give you a little bit of sense for the type of items that are covered, the amount of money available under the Last Post Fund is not great in terms of if you look at the cost of a funeral today, I'm told it's in the vicinity of \$8,000 or \$9,000, but the Last Post Fund, generally you may end up with anywhere from \$5,000 to \$6,000. The amounts have to be adjusted certainly for inflation and cost of living over the last number of years because they have not been amended since - well they were cut back before they have been amended.

These are some of the items that are not covered. This gives you a little bit of sense for closer to home, in Nova Scotia the number of cases, the comparison for the last five years. The actual program itself overall, it's about \$8 million that's dispensed every year for the Funeral and Burial Program. You can see in Nova Scotia, we're about \$1 million of that and there are 271 applicants in 2009 cases that we approved. It's a good thing that we're there, but I think it's a bit of a sad commentary that we have that many veterans out there who are not that well off financially, so that's something you people may encounter in your deliberations.

That, in essence, covers the Funeral and Burial Program, but the mandate of the Last Post Fund per se is much broader than that and we get involved in other activities that we use our donation money for. I might mention that the Funeral and Burial Program, as I touched on, is all Veterans Affairs money, about \$8 million a year. Veterans Affairs is somewhat concerned about our administrative costs because our administrative costs are about \$2.2 million on top of that \$8 million, so it costs \$2.2 million to deliver an \$8 million program and anyone in business would look at that and say, that's not a very good ratio, but you have to look at the nature of the beast, you have to pay people to look after these applications. Anyway, we've taken that to heed and we're doing some restructuring of our offices to try to accommodate the Veterans Affairs concerns in that particular area.

In addition to that we do special grave marking programs, we procure headstones, markers, for the Department of National Defence and I'll just go through these quickly. Any veteran who has had an unmarked grave for over five years and we determine that he was, in fact, a veteran, we will undertake to mark his grave and provide a headstone for that particular person. We have a lot of volunteers, believe it or not, who run around cemeteries all day. It's not a very exciting job, but some of them enjoy it and I give them credit for doing that. This is just a sample, you've seen that in your handout I think, the marker that we provide. We have an upright and a flat.

This gives you an indication of the number of markers in Nova Scotia that we've placed over the last number of years. There have been about 126 at a cost of \$82,000, so we are making a little bit of progress. We will act very promptly and to my knowledge we don't have any backlog out there so that's a good thing, unless the people I talked about decided to give up their job but I don't think that's the case.

Providing headstones for the Department of National Defence is something relatively new for us and I think it has its genesis in the tragedy coming out of Afghanistan where we've experienced deaths for the first time in a long time in that particular arena. Because of our experience in this, the Department of National Defence, we buy their headstones for them in many cases and they simply reimburse us for that particular service.

We have Fields of Honour. I invite you, if you are near Montreal, Pointe-Claire, Quebec, particularly, to visit the National Field of Honour that the Last Post owns and operates there. As I indicated, there have been more than 20,000 veterans and their family members there. It was recognized as an historic site last summer, as part of our 100th Anniversary, so it is well worth a visit. It is certainly not on the scale of Arlington National Cemetery but it is a facsimile thereof.

Our branch here in Halifax, the Nova Scotia branch, has its own columbarium in the Fairview Lawn Cemetery. We have 176 niches. We opened this about five years ago and they are virtually all sold to veterans. In addition to veterans, as we know the traditional veteran, people who are serving in the forces today are also eligible to purchase a niche in our columbarium. I don't know if any of you have seen it over there or not. There are several of these across Canada. In some places many cemeteries will allocate a space for veterans and the Last Post Fund in that area will designate it as a Field of Honour and veterans can go there for their final resting place. So I think that kind of says it all, in terms of the *raison d'être* for the Last Post Fund. I think you people in your forum here can certainly complement the work that Mr. Hair is advocating that we continue.

I would be delighted to take any questions if you have any.

THE CHAIR: We appreciate this explanation. There are a number of sides to this that I wasn't aware of before; I'm sure that is true of others. Are there responses or questions? Mr. Gaudet.

HON. WAYNE GAUDET: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to go back to the net asset value, I'm not quite clear on that one. In order to determine whether a veteran is eligible, do we look at how much money is in the bank? Do we look at, in terms of assets, a house, a cottage, a car, a truck?

BARRY KEELER: All of that is looked at but as I alluded, Mr. Gaudet, it is not as bad because they don't count the house or the cottage or the car, that sort of thing, but

they would count bonds or debentures or stocks or life insurance policies.

WAYNE GAUDET: What I'm looking at, \$12,000 or less.

BARRY KEELER: You have to be pretty bad off but having said that, once you take out a person's house and car and add on their debts that they might have and add the cost of a funeral for \$6,000 or \$7,000, if that person is living near the poverty line, they're going to get to that \$12,000 or under it.

WAYNE GAUDET: I'm just looking at the monthly or yearly household income for that veteran or that veteran and his loved one. So the household income is also included in that asset count?

BARRY KEELER: That's right but a lot of that household income will diminish as a result of the veteran's demise.

You touch on a good point. Veterans Affairs, as you well know, I expect, have an ombudsman, Mr. Pat Strogran who recently undertook an evaluation of the Last Post Fund. The amounts were of concern to his committee and they rendered in their report - and we're hoping that report will get some attention on the part of the federal government. It has a lot of support from the Legion and other similar type of veteran organizations. That's one of the main things in that report is to have those limits elevated and also to get away from, you are allowed \$4,100 for a casket or whatever the case may be or \$300 for an urn, and make it a lump-sum amount available so the individual can decide how they might wish to dispense that, in terms of the program.

That report was released about eight months ago or so and we're hoping that some good will come out of that, along with a lot of other lobbying efforts that are taking place. I should perhaps have indicated some of the other things. The administration of the funeral and burial - these are the recommendations from that report, that the program be simplified by using a discretionary lump-sum approach for reimbursable expenses rather than the itemized thing and that the stated exemption for the surviving spouse for the means test be increased in line with present-day incomes and cost levels. So it's an area that we've been banging away at to have this whole program as governed by the Funeral and Burial Regulations promulgated by Veterans Affairs and approved by Treasury Board, of course, trying to have those rates for the last five years and we keep running up against a wall but we are told that approval may be imminent, so there is some hope.

That's a long way of saying I agree with what you're saying but, having said that, if you had to count the person's house, if they have one, then no one is going to get it so thank God that's exempt, as it were.

WAYNE GAUDET: Thank you.

BARRY KEELER: You're welcome. Another area that I might just touch on -

maybe it might generate some discussion, and I thought you might get a question - when you look at the people who are eligible for the Last Post Fund, our constituency, we're in a dying business. The veterans from the Second World War, I think there's about 150,000 or 160,000 of those souls left and they're dying at the rate of about 20,000 a month, so within the next eight years or thereabouts, the Last Post Fund, in terms of its service for veterans in terms of funeral and burial, could reach its demise.

We wouldn't like to see that happen but obviously, if you don't have veterans to bury, there is a big area of concern. It almost goes back to Arthur Hair's point, who is looking after these people? That's what prompted him, out of an act of compassion or respect or dignity or patriotism or whatever, to take the action that he took.

Right now we have a category of people that I personally find quite disturbing, and you people might when I tell you this, and I refer to what they call modern-day veterans. These are the people who are serving in the Canadian Forces and maybe have served for three years or 20 years, it doesn't matter, and then they get out. The Canadian Forces souls are pretty well paid these days so there wouldn't be too many of those people who would fall upon hard times, hopefully, and they would be able to afford their own funeral and burial. But for the poor chap who may have fallen on hard times and has no one, much like Private Daly, and did serve his country, there's no provision to look after him right now.

The cases that come to our attention, we will bury them using our very limited donation funds. We've had two cases in New Brunswick recently where we, in fact, did that. So in your circles, in your committee work, I would certainly appreciate if you could give this some consideration and the modern-day veterans total about 600,000 people here in Canada. So that's an area that needs to be addressed, in my view. That would facilitate extending the life of the Last Post Fund.

I throw that out for what it's worth but that's something that a lot of people don't think of and the young chap serving in the military today is not really thinking of that because he doesn't think he's going to die.

THE CHAIR: Mr. MacMaster.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Has the federal government ever looked at expanding the criteria to allow for modern-day veterans?

BARRY KEELER: It's under consideration, yes. It hasn't gotten to first base yet but certainly in the Ombudsman's report, that was one of his more prominent recommendations, along with what Mr. Gaudet alluded to in terms of the financial limits. The Dominion Legion, the Command - every year they put forth a resolution as part of their annual general meeting, to that effect. But the more people who bang in on a letter from you folks to Minister Blackburn at Veterans Affairs, it may also get some attention.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Chairman, that's just what I was going to suggest, that we discuss a letter of support to the federal government to indicate the need to consider modern-day veterans who may not have the financial resources to have a deserving, appropriate burial.

THE CHAIR: Any comment on Mr. MacMaster's suggestion? Is it agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: It is agreed.

BARRY KEELER: I thank my honourable colleague from St. F.X.; we're not in collusion. If you could include in that and just put a little pitch in - to get back to Mr. Gaudet's point - about the financial limits, I think that might be constructive also. Thank you for that.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Raymond.

MICHELE RAYMOND: I have one very quick question. You mentioned there are certain restrictions on Korean War veterans' funerals. Could you talk about that a little bit, on the eligibility?

BARRY KEELER: They had to actually go offshore and not just be designated to go to Korea. If they didn't make it, then they didn't qualify and that's the thrust of that. That's in essence what it was.

MICHELE RAYMOND: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I was wanting to ask about the means by which veterans' families become aware as they're concluding final arrangements about the Last Post Fund. In my own personal experience, one of the main ways in which this comes to people's awareness is the sympathy card that the fund seems to be in the habit of getting in the hands of families. I've often wondered about this card - many of which I've seen and people are proud to have received it and might show it to a person - what it was that triggered the fund to send the card.

As I've wondered about this it has occurred to me that the fund has occurred to send the card by means of the obituaries. The reason I think this is I have an association with a co-operative non-profit funeral home, which often following the death of a veteran there will be an inquiry from the fund as to the address of such and such people. Because of my work, I've noticed that the address we've given to the fund is exactly worded in the way that the envelope comes from the sympathy card.

This is a concern because if this is so, it means that there is no means for the fund to be in touch at the time of a veteran's death unless the association with the Canadian Forces of the veteran is mentioned in the obituary and that's not always the case. What goes into an obituary, of course, is dependent largely on one's family and it's not

uncommon that there are, with time, situations of fragmentation that lead to, at the time of an obituary being crafted, the obituary being quite bare and omitting.

It has occurred to me, as I've wondered about this, why would there be no association for generating this information to the fund with DVA itself? DVA would know, those with whom it is in a benefits relationship and when that relationship has finished, because the veteran had passed away.

If I'm right, that Last Post makes its contact through the obituaries, would it not be possible for that to happen through DVA itself and it would cover a wider ground, there would be less danger of losing people?

BARRY KEELER: You raise a good point. My understanding of that - and that detail I'm not that close to - but it struck me, if you look at the obituary pages you'll see the Canadian flag above some of them. In other cases, I know they were veterans and that flag wasn't there. I had our people contact The Halifax ChronicleHerald and their position on this is that we only give that in the event that the person was in the First or Second World War and Korean veterans. I think there is some inconsistency in that and it's an area that I'm dealing with The ChronicleHerald on - to try to have it changed that if anyone served in the Canadian Forces, that they might have that flag.

THE CHAIR: Well, it's not rare that the flag does not appear for World War II veterans at their death. The only way the flag is triggered for the editors of the paper is if the family has included the military service. There are many circumstances in which the family might not do that. So this seems to me that there would be a danger of an opportunity to be in touch with deceased veterans' families that this system could miss.

BARRY KEELER: Well that's a good point and I will certainly raise that, continue to raise it with The ChronicleHerald. Also, I tend to give presentations to a lot of Legion groups and other similar organizations and that's an aspect that I could give some emphasis to, in terms of the obituary, that they're very clear on that.

I have one lady who starts her day off at the office here, and that's all she does, is read obituaries. Not a very exciting life but that's what she does. Then she sends a letter out to the family. Whether or not they're eligible, it doesn't matter, but at least recognizing that we are available should they be eligible.

I think we're constantly looking at ways to try to market the program, as it were. It's not easy. Word of mouth, I think, is probably the best but it's an area that the ombudsman also noticed but how much do you do to reach - I've never heard of anyone really falling through the cracks.

THE CHAIR: I have.

BARRY KEELER: Have you?

THE CHAIR: Oh, yes.

BARRY KEELER: I hope they were able to come back within the year.

THE CHAIR: Yes, but for anecdotal, random reasons; that's kind of what had raised the concern.

Are there other responses? Well, if I could ask you a little more about this matter of being in touch with the families of deceased veterans. One very important person in this equation, of course, is the funeral director. In my experience it is usually funeral directors who bring the fund to the awareness of families at the time of making arrangements. It is the case in the principal funeral home that serves the people of the constituency that I serve that information about the fund has not been forwarded there in the last decade.

So I wonder if this were the case, provincially, an opportunity would be missed, because I think that the fund depends on that network of community funeral directors who do personally usually know if a person has military service and have it in their checklist of . . .

[10:30 a.m.]

MICHELE RAYMOND: It would be a simple thing to put in a checklist.

THE CHAIR: Yes, but there would be costs associated with this, but it was through the 1990s quite common, every two or three years there was Last Post stuff. I'm not aware of the Last Post stuff having arrived in the last decade in the funeral co-operative that I'm associated with.

BARRY KEELER: I think you're dead right. I can go to the funeral home on Windsor Street here and I know because I personally took some stuff there, but I appreciate that and we can improve that. We do speak to the young students who are aspiring to become funeral home personnel, once a year, but that doesn't help out in the area that you're talking about. We used to have pamphlets and all of that sort of stuff there and I will ensure that that's given some emphasis.

THE CHAIR: I would like to ask again about Mr. Gaudet's question. Do you have a sense when the more recent adjustment to the net assets number - the \$12,000 - was made, roughly?

BARRY KEELER: No, I know when it was decreased, it was decreased back about 1994, from \$24,000 down to the \$12,000. I don't know prior to that, but it's long overdue and that's why I make the point that if you could make reference to that it may serve some useful purpose.

THE CHAIR: Any other responses to the material? Rear Admiral Keeler, is there kind of a concluding thought that you would like to leave us with?

BARRY KEELER: No, I think I've achieved my aim certainly to garner your support for the means test exemptions and the other dollars limits in that particular area and the modern day veterans, which I think is a significant item that's worthy of pursuit.

The only other area I think we've made some good progress is, educating our young people in the schools. I've noticed for the last five years I lay a wreath each Remembrance Day at the Cenotaph, and it's impressive to see the number of young people showing up for that event and the events that are taking place in the school. I certainly give credit to your committee and any involvement you've had in that and the Legions, et cetera. So I think any emphasis you can place on that to ensure that continues would pay dividends in terms of giving the recognition to our veterans that they so deserve.

On that note, I'd simply say thank you once again for this opportunity and I thank your able assistant, Kim Langille, for her help.

THE CHAIR: Mr. MacLeod.

ALFIE MACLEOD: Just a passing thought, but I wonder if it would be possible, sir, if indeed you do get any update regarding the limits and/or the amounts, that you forward that on to Kim, so that we could keep aware of the situation?

BARRY KEELER: I would be delighted to. Our executive committee for the Last Post Fund meets in Montreal in a week or so and we meet twice a year and we also have an annual meeting in June. One of our members is a fairly senior representative from Veterans Affairs and that's the first question we ask him at every meeting and we get the same answer for the last six years. They're getting closer, but they always kind of threaten, maybe we're going to get a new government, something will happen and they won't pursue it. I will gladly do that and look at the other points, Mr. Chairman, that you've raised, certainly the marketing aspects.

THE CHAIR: Well, we appreciate this opportunity a lot, so we thank you very much.

BARRY KEELER: Good, thank you very much. I'm sure you are busy, but try to get out on the golf course today or something.

Mr. Chairman, I have a book here, a history of the Last Post that I would gladly leave with you. It's for the first 90 years and it makes for some very interesting reading and much more in-depth than what I have. You can use it for your library or whatever you'd like to do.

THE CHAIR: We have a few other matters that we're going to think about. We'll take a couple of seconds. Thank you.

We all have this memo from Clarrie MacKinnon about the postcard of thanks proposal. In the memo, Clarrie has explained the result of the research into the project and has really concluded that it is logistically pretty (Interruption) Oh, we don't all have it. Okay, I'll just summarize that we had discussed this previously and a number of questions have been brought forward about the postcard of thanks program. Information has been obtained. I'd like to provide this information for your review.

The postcards are supplied by Veterans Affairs, they ordered the cards in bulk and would require our order no later than the end of March. This committee does have a small budget but it is not sufficient to cover the cost of the postage that would be required to mail the postcards, which is estimated to be around \$6,000. In addition, our ability to obtain an accurate and inclusive list of veterans in the province is in question.

Veterans Affairs has indicated that it is unable to provide this information, therefore, wasted postage would be a concern.

We don't have any way of ensuring that the postcards are sent to the right place and the postage is an upfront cost. Given all of the above, perhaps the committee ought to look at some other method of recognizing veterans. For example, perhaps focusing on veterans in long-term care, making personal visits to veterans units through committee members. This is just a summary of his note. In other words, what we had mentioned a few months ago about the postcard program is logistically pretty tough.

MICHELE RAYMOND: If Veterans Affairs doesn't want to support it by giving addresses and things, I would say that's pretty conclusive. I mean we'd be getting into detective work.

ALFIE MACLEOD: Probably privacy issues.

MICHELE RAYMOND: I would think that's exactly what it is, yes.

ALFIE MACLEOD: The only option might be to work through your local Legion and get a membership list from them and provide them with enough cards for their members but again, that would be a very cumbersome way of doing it and probably a guarantee that you're going to miss someone because not all veterans are active Legion members, for sure.

WAYNE GAUDET: Maybe what we should consider, Mr. Chairman, is if we did have the cards, to provide them. First of all, contact the schools, the school boards, to let the schools know that our committee has thank you cards available for veterans and if the schools are interested in sending cards out to veterans in their area, they can contact our

chairman and through the chairman or our office we can send those cards through them.

ALLAN MACMASTER: That's a good idea.

THE CHAIR: Any responses?

MICHELE RAYMOND: So they would request first, right? Have the schools request them first.

WAYNE GAUDET: We will communicate with the school boards . . .

MICHELE RAYMOND: Just say, if you are interested.

WAYNE GAUDET: Yes, if you are interested.

KIM LANGILLE: On that, packages are sent out from Veterans Affairs to all schools in Nova Scotia and across the country with not only the postcards but all their kind of educational material, to make schools aware that this stuff is going on.

ALFIE MACLEOD: But the good news is that it appears to be working. More and more schools and more and more young people are aware of veterans, and the Remembrance Day services in my area have increased by the schools almost by 60 per cent or 70 per cent over even five years ago. So something must be working, I guess, if they're doing that, which is a good thing.

THE CHAIR: So is it our mind that this is perhaps not the effective way to achieve our goal through the actual postcard program itself? We don't need a motion if we're all agreed, that makes sense.

Then is there anything else that needs to come before the committee? Okay, well are we agreed to adjourn? Very good, thanks.

[The committee adjourned at 10:44 a.m.]