

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Thursday, September 9, 2010

Committee Room 1

Merchant Navy Veterans

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VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Clarrie MacKinnon (Chair)
Gary Burrill
Michele Raymond
Sidney Prest
Jim Boudreau
Hon. Wayne Gaudet
Mr. Harold Theriault
Alfie MacLeod
Allan MacMaster

[Jim Boudreau was replaced by Gary Ramey.]

In Attendance:

Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

Veterans Affairs Canada - Atlantic Region

Krista Locke
Regional Director General

Lorraine Gailey
Regional Director Communications

Gordon Thomas
Client Service Team Manager



HALIFAX, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2010

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIR
Clarrie MacKinnon

THE CHAIR: Good morning ladies and gentlemen. We do have a quorum and we expect that there will be another member, too, coming along shortly. (Interruption) Speaking of that, there's another member coming along shortly.

We welcome our guests here and we will get each one to do an introduction in a moment but first we'll begin with the member for Inverness for introductions, and we'll go around the table.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: We have received two indications of not being available: one from Harold Theriault, MLA for Digby-Annapolis; and the other from Alfie MacLeod, MLA for Cape Breton West.

We will begin and perhaps introductions of our guests, if you would, please.

KRISTA LOCKE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm Krista Locke and I'm the Regional Director General for the Atlantic Region, Veterans Affairs Canada. I have with me Gordon Thomas, who is our Client Service Team Manager in our Halifax District Office. He is the expert on our programs and services and will be here to answer all your questions on those related topics. I also have Lorraine Gailey who is our Director for Communications and our Canada Remembers programming in the Atlantic Region.

THE CHAIR: We have, in fact, allocated an hour but we are very flexible in this committee and if we go over the hour, that's fine and if we are under, that's fine as well because we do have some other business. So thank you very much and we look forward to your presentation.

KRISTA LOCKE: Okay, so in the discussion this morning I will begin by providing a brief overview of the history of Merchant Navy support in Canada, focusing specifically on pensions, recognition and commemoration, as well as compensation.

I'll describe the Merchant Navy special benefit which was paid to merchant mariners or their survivors in 2000, as well as the services and benefits Merchant Navy veterans are eligible for today. Finally, I'll provide you with some statistics regarding our current Merchant Navy clients in Nova Scotia and across Canada.

During and immediately after the Second World War, pensions were available to merchant mariners or their survivors/dependants under the Civilian War Pensions and Allowances Act, as long as the disability or death was a result of enemy action. In other words, in order to qualify for services and benefits, merchant mariners had to have service on the high seas, meaning they had to have seen service on waters outside Canadian territorial waters and/or on any water on which a ship was attacked by the enemy. This is what we called dangerous waters.

In 1992, with the introduction of a new Act called the Merchant Navy Veteran and Civilian War-related Benefits Act, merchant mariners were recognized as veterans at that time and the restriction of enemy action or counteraction was removed. As a result, today pensions are now available for disability or death, as long as it is related to general service. The new Act also provided Merchant Navy veterans with increased opportunity to qualify for the Veterans Independence Program, long-term care benefits, and funeral and burial assistance which we'll talk about a little later.

Recognition of Merchant Navy veterans continued to grow throughout the 1990s, beginning in 1993 when the 50th Anniversary of the Battle of the Atlantic was marked with full delegations travelling to ceremonies held in Canada and in England. Then, in 1994, eligibility for the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal was extended to these veterans or their next-of-kin and then a Merchant Navy Book of Remembrance was installed in the Memorial Chamber of the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill. The Book of Remembrance lists the names of Canadian merchant mariners who gave their lives during the First and Second World Wars.

It is worth noting here that with the casualty rate of one in seven, merchant mariners serving on the high seas suffered the highest proportionate number of casualties of any of Canada's fighting services. In 2003, September 3rd was proclaimed Merchant Navy Veterans Day and now each year ceremonies are held in communities across Nova Scotia and Canada to honour the sacrifices and contributions of all those who served in Canada's Merchant Navy during World War II. We just had that ceremony; I attend the

one in Halifax every year.

On February 1st, 2000, the former Minister of Veterans Affairs, the Honourable George Baker, announced a tax-free, one-time compensatory award for Canada's Merchant Navy veterans and surviving spouses. The benefit provided compensation to Merchant Navy veterans for lost opportunities resulting from their ineligibility for the same post-war demobilization benefits as Armed Forces veterans.

These eligibility criteria were determined at the time with input from five associations representing the interests of the Merchant Navy veterans. The five associations included the Canadian Merchant Navy Veterans Association, the Merchant Navy Coalition for Equality, the Royal Canadian Legion, the National Council of Veterans Associations, and the Army-Navy-Air Force Veterans in Canada. A total of \$104.5 million was allocated by the Government of Canada for this compensation package.

Payments were made according to the length of service as follows: \$20,000 was awarded for war-related service of more than 24 months; \$10,000 for war-related service between six months and 24 months; and \$5,000 for war-related service between one and six months or for less than one month if captured, killed, or disabled. An additional 20 per cent was paid to, or on behalf of, any veteran receiving this benefit who spent time as a prisoner of war. In total, almost 2,300 special benefit awards were paid to merchant mariners or their survivors with an average payout of \$11,761.50. The total payout is \$98.7 million.

Today merchant mariners have the same eligibility as Canadian overseas service veterans. When Teresa Laforest was here a few months ago, I know she talked about some of the services and benefits available to eligible, traditional veterans, so I won't go into too much detail about individual programs although Gordon is here to answer any questions. Just as a high-level overview, these programs and services would include access to disability pensions, providing compensation for disability or death related to service, and other Pension Act benefits such as attendants allowance, clothing allowance, exceptional incapacity allowance and prisoner of war compensation.

War veterans allowance would also be available which provides a regular, monthly payment to low-income clients; survivors or dependants may also be eligible based on the veteran's service. Health care includes health benefits such as medical, surgical and dental care, prescription drugs and hearing and vision aids, as well as the Veterans Independence Program (VIP) which is our national home care program that helps qualified veterans remain healthy and independent in their own homes and communities. This program provides support for services like groundskeeping and housekeeping, personal care, et cetera.

Long-term care would also be a service available in a facility like Camp Hill, like we have here in Halifax, or one of the many community care facilities that we have

agreements with across the country. We can also provide assistance to qualified applicants for cost of funeral, burial and grave marking through our funeral and burial program which is administered by the Last Post Fund on behalf of Veterans Affairs Canada.

As of August 2010, Veterans Affairs Canada has 1,157 total Merchant Navy veteran clients and 184 of those live here in Nova Scotia. As you may know, the average age of the World War II veteran is now 86. We recognize that their needs continue to change and some will require more intensive and complex care now and in the future. We are ready to meet those needs and are committed to ensuring that all of our veteran clients receive the care and assistance they deserve and this includes our Merchant Navy veterans.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. We will start with a speakers list and we are very informal in this committee and we do not delegate time by Party - we just begin and go on until the questions stop. Who would like to go first? Michele Raymond.

MICHELE RAYMOND: Thank you very much for coming in and, of course, it's always very interesting to me because I have been aware of the Merchant Navy's struggles since Earle Wagner began arguing about this. I have always been surprised by the number of people who for a long time weren't actually conscious that they were considered as veterans.

I guess I have two questions. One very quickly, are you fairly confident that you have identified most of the Merchant Navy veterans or is it up to them to self-identify at this point?

LORRAINE GAILEY: If I may, at the time that the compensation award was first announced, of course there was an announcement made and there was a full communications initiative around that as well. We put postings as far and wide as we could in the media and in our offices, we provided training for our staff so that they could speak to it as well, including the people who work on the telephones and so forth. We worked very closely with the veterans' organizations themselves also to try to expand the reach as far as possible.

[9:15 a.m.]

MICHELE RAYMOND: That is, I guess, one of the challenges of the particular nature of the beast.

KRISTA LOCKE: Do you have anything to add, Gordon?

GORDON THOMAS: No, I just know that a lot of times we do rely on people to self-identify but, as Lorraine said, with the media blitz that went on around the compensation, we did get a lot of people in.

MICHELE RAYMOND: Another quick question?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MICHELE RAYMOND: Actually the other question I had was related to compensation and how it was derived. One of the things I have heard some Merchant Navy veterans mention is that they weren't eligible for any kind of post-secondary education benefits. Was there any attempt to even calculate the value of that over a lifetime?

KRISTA LOCKE: Lorraine, did you want to respond to that as well?

LORRAINE GAILEY: I can speak very overview to it because it's going back a way in history for me. I was with the department at the time and I do know that they did some calculations based on the lost opportunity cost. That was counterbalanced by some information that, of course, after the war the people who served with the Merchant Marines continued to have jobs, they were employed and they remained employed. Unfortunately, shortly thereafter, the shipping industry did kind of shift and change and we saw fundamental changes in the sector so it resulted as we've seen today in other industries that do shift as well over time.

In answer to your question, with education benefits and other re-establishment, no, they weren't offered them at the time. I believe that did go into the calculations for compensation but I would have to check with our policy people in head office, specifically to that. A lot of the people, actually, who worked on that in the past have now retired, so we'd have to dig back a little, but we can get back to you on that.

MICHELE RAYMOND: All of this is a long time ago, for sure, and it's a tough one to quantify. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Gary Ramey.

GARY RAMEY: Mr. Chairman, my father was a First and Second World War veteran; probably I'm one of the few kids who had a dad who did both of them. He was a Vickers machine-gunner in World War I and then he was in the Air Force in World War II. He always had a huge amount of respect for the merchant mariners because I think he figured out, correctly, that without the merchant mariners, none of the things that they needed in order to do their jobs would ever have gotten to Europe.

My question is, what was the problem with recognizing merchant mariners right from the get-go? Was there any reasonable explanation for that, because I could never figure it out?

KRISTA LOCKE: I believe, and again we'd have to go back to confirm, but my

understanding at the time was because they often worked for a private industry, they were looked at as a group who had a job after the war and weren't considered veterans of the war at that time. So it took a number of years before they would go back and recognize the merchant mariners as veterans, and rightly so.

GARY RAMEY: It would have struck me, however, that if you were hauling military material and you were putting your life on the line on a regular basis to do so, it should be a no-brainer to figure out that these people were significant contributors to the war effort. So that's one thing. May I have a supplementary?

THE CHAIR: Certainly, by all means.

GARY RAMEY: My second question, and maybe it has been explained and I kind of missed how we did it, but how did we come up with the \$20,000?

KRISTA LOCKE: My understanding, from what I've looked into, is that they worked with the five associations . . .

GARY RAMEY: I recollect you mentioning that.

KRISTA LOCKE: . . . and looking as well on lost opportunities and what benefits would have been accessible if they had been recognized as veterans from the get-go. All of that was taken into account and calculated.

LORRAINE GAILEY: I think, and again, I don't know the details, I will get those for you, but I do know that they looked at the average value of the benefits that individuals received post-war. For example, I know my mother was Air Force and she received an amount of money to assist her in purchasing her first home. Others did get education benefits, others had land to purchase and so forth. I would imagine they looked at the present discounted value of the average of those benefits received but I would have to get back to you with the specifics on that.

GARY RAMEY: Another question?

THE CHAIR: You have as many supplementaries as you want.

GARY RAMEY: I don't want to hog all the time.

THE CHAIR: We have lots of time.

GARY RAMEY: Did anybody look at the fact that if they had received a pension like other military personnel right from the get-go, what that amount would have added up to, in relation to the actual \$20,000 that they got? That would seem to me to be a reasonable way of trying to figure it out. Do you wish to comment on that?

LORRAINE GAILEY: It was really a compensation for lost opportunities; it wasn't to equate pensions that didn't get paid out. It was a recognition that the government had not done what maybe should have been done at the time. As we have done with other compensation packages, it is a recognition as opposed to an actual payout benefit.

KRISTA LOCKE: Gordon, you can correct me but I understand that the merchant mariners - if they were injured on the high seas, they could access a pension under the Civilian Act, so a pension was available to them if they were injured, a disability pension due to their service. What we were talking about, the compensation, was different.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr. Gary Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: Just to say first, in response to Gary's question about how this terrible injustice ever got off in the first place, I think many people would say that one of the reasons was that in the 10 years after the war, Canadian merchant mariners were organized within the Canadian Seamen's Union, with which the federal government was in a war to the death - and which the federal government eventually won - in the matter of Hal Banks and the Seafarers International Union. I think this is a primary background for why we ended up in this unjust mess.

In the righting of the mess, as you have explained it, I want to ask a couple of specifics about how it works. Is there a statute of limitations on the year 2000 agreement? May a merchant marine veteran at any time apply for those benefits, or was there a period within which you had to do that?

GORDON THOMAS: You're talking about the compensation benefits?

GARY BURRILL: Yes.

GORDON THOMAS: My understanding is that there were limitations. There was a period of time that people were able to apply and it is my understanding that that is over now.

GARY BURRILL: A veteran may not become eligible now, if they had not been received into the program within that statute of limitations?

GORDON THOMAS: No, I think we're talking about two different things. One is the compensation monies that were given to the Merchant Navy. That was a period of time - my understanding - where the people were encouraged to apply and there was a period of time that they had to do that. That was just for the money part.

For other benefits and services, Merchant Navy veterans still are eligible for any of those. They have been for quite some time.

GARY BURRILL: Would this be also true for surviving spouses?

GORDON THOMAS: For the compensation?

GARY BURRILL: No, for ongoing benefits.

GORDON THOMAS: Oh yes.

GARY BURRILL: I'm trying to think, for example, if you had a surviving spouse of a merchant veteran who was never received into the compensation program, nor identified to DVA. Would that spouse now, on presenting herself or himself, be eligible for DVA benefits? There's no reason to think they wouldn't.

GORDON THOMAS: We would certainly take the application and look at the circumstances and see if they would be eligible, for sure, yes.

GARY BURRILL: That's so interesting, thanks.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Allan MacMaster.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You had mentioned a figure - it think it was one in seven was killed or injured. How would that compare to the military? I wouldn't expect you to have the numbers but I was just curious because it seems like it was a pretty risky occupation at the time.

KRISTA LOCKE: It was, and I think given the total number which was smaller, it was quite a number, quite a stat.

LORRAINE GAILEY: And I think you have to look at elements of the military, too - the infantry versus the airborne service and so forth. I don't have those statistics but I do know for a fact that the Merchant Navy were exposed to the highest level. National Defence has provided us those statistics in the past and it is quite significant, the level of risk they were exposed to.

ALLAN MACMASTER: The pension that they are offered - and one thing you mentioned, too, is that a lot of these people if they made it through the war, they continued to work in the Merchant Navy. Would that be the case?

I guess I should ask my question. The question I'm trying to get to is, I guess those people would have a pension from continued service?

LORRAINE GAILEY: Commercially, you mean?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Yes, what happened to them after the war?

LORRAINE GAILEY: As Mr. Burrill pointed out, there was a significant change in the industry. There were very solid labour disputes ongoing for quite some time. I'm certainly no expert on the history but the whole industry was in a state of flux at the time; the different sides became entrenched. It meant that some individuals did lose their jobs and they didn't have a continuity of service.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think it was into 1946 and 1947 - right into 1950 maybe. So they did lose out and that was what was recognized through the compensation.

ALLAN MACMASTER: And the last question - where in Nova Scotia would most of these people be? Would they be mostly around HRM?

LORRAINE GAILEY: During their service?

ALLAN MACMASTER: No, today.

LORRAINE GAILEY: Oh today, hard to say.

KRISTA LOCKE: Scattered throughout but it is something we could provide you with, if you're interested in the breakdown.

ALLAN MACMASTER: I'm just curious. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Wayne Gaudet.

HON. WAYNE GAUDET: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks for your presentation. I guess I want to start off with - if I understood correctly - compensation which began in 2000 to these veterans or their spouses. Going back to 2000, how many Nova Scotia Merchant Navy veterans or spouses did receive benefits? Do you have that?

KRISTA LOCKE: Those numbers, I do. For Nova Scotia - oh, we have national figures only.

LORRAINE GAILEY: We can get that for you, I think, but we don't have it here today. We have what our clients are today but not at the time.

WAYNE GAUDET: Good. Looking at your graph, you pointed out there are 184 Merchant Marine veterans left in Nova Scotia. Are those 184 receiving benefits?

LORRAINE GAILEY: Yes, these are our clients. There may be others not receiving benefits, but those are our known clients.

WAYNE GAUDET: Then my next question is, how many spouses in Nova Scotia are receiving benefits?

KRISTA LOCKE: We don't have that information but we can get that easily - how many spouses of survivors.

WAYNE GAUDET: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Other questions from the committee? It has been very informative, we certainly appreciate your attendance here this morning and look forward to getting a few of those statistics. We will offer the floor to anyone with any questions before we wrap up. Any additional questions? Gary Ramey.

GARY RAMEY: I just have a quick one. I'm a little mystified as to why there would have been a statute of limitations put on the initial compensation award. If you deserve it because you did it, you deserve it because you did it. I don't understand, personally, why there would be a time period in which if you didn't get your name in there, you don't get it. Is there any reasonable explanation for that one?

KRISTA LOCKE: I can go back to our department and ask that question. I do know that most compensation packages do have time limitations to apply, but as far as an explanation for the rationale, I will certainly bring that back to this committee.

LORRAINE GAILEY: It's probably related to the legal advice we received, but we were here earlier this year and presented on Agent Orange and I think people are aware we are rapidly approaching the final close off for any exceptional cases that still remain. Most of them had a limitation that has already come and gone and for the most part that's what they try to do. The monies are attached to a specific time period, but there's always things that can be looked at. Whether we can address them or not, hard to say.

[9:30 a.m.]

GARY RAMEY: Because of the nature of the sacrifice made or the nature of the sacrifice that the person was willing to make for Canada, I don't see it as a legal imperative. I see it as a moral imperative. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Michele Raymond.

MICHELE RAYMOND: I guess I'd just like to say again, thank you very much and I really am awfully grateful for your coming in because it has seemed for a long time that this remains kind of an unrecognized group. Sometimes when I go to the Legions and so on, even then there seems not to be that much of an awareness or an inclusion necessarily of those people who are Merchant Navy veterans in the community. I don't know whether that is universal or just something that does happen.

Watching how these numbers of Merchant Navy veterans are dwindling very rapidly, the ringing of that bell every year seems to be fewer and fewer people who have

actually departed during that year. I hope - and I don't know if you can tell me - is there anywhere an archival collection, any place that particularly is a repository of Merchant Navy memorabilia? I say this, too, because part of my own relationship to that is my family are Bermudian and we were always taught that the Merchant Navy was absolutely the lifeline of Bermuda.

One of the things that I found recently was an autograph book that my mother had as a little girl. Of course, these were often people who came to the house, merchant mariners, and my grandfather would bring them and give them dinner and so on. I've always wondered, there are a number of photographs and things, is there a Merchant Navy archives, is it some part of the war museum, is it accepted at Cambridge Library, is there a distinct place?

LORRAINE GAILEY: I think it would be included in the war museum collection. If I may, we're planning to try to include a recognition of the Merchant Navy this year as part of the Navy Centennial celebrations. In my capacity as the Commemoration Director, I'm just starting to look into if there's some way we can officially do that and establish a display or recognition, possibly at the CFB Halifax Maritime Command Museum over there or somewhere else. We're not quite sure where, but I feel it's very important.

My grandfather worked at Immigration at Pier 21 during the war. He had been a World War I veteran and they had merchant mariners come in and stay at their place, a couch of last resort at some point, so it is important to recognize it. I know there are various Legion branches that people probably contribute things to. People convey things to our department quite regularly and we're at a point where we can't accept anything anymore and we try to redirect them to other places. So that is one of my objectives for this year, to try to establish where will we do that for here in the Atlantic Region.

MICHELE RAYMOND: But at this moment is there anywhere in Canada? Is there centrally even a specifically Merchant Navy . . .

LORRAINE GAILEY: I would have to ask Earle Wagner on that one, but my sense would probably be the War Museum.

THE CHAIR: Gary Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: Just to go back for a second to the point that Mr. Ramey was making, I think part of understanding about that has to do with the context out of which the compensation plan was developed. We know that the Merchant Navy Association approached the federal government with this proposal for two decades and was every year refused. This was a result of a long, long struggle in which the position had always been you are not veterans, the government will not recognize you as veterans. This was a huge accomplishment when the compensation package was agreed to.

One of the reasons, I think, it was agreed to in the way that it stood was that it had seemed for so many years that the eventual result of this was just going to be nothing. I think it's important to understand the struggle by the Merchant Navy Association that this package was achieved out of.

LORRAINE GAILEY: There were a number of individuals, Mr. Gordon Olmstead or Aurele Ferlatte down here; many of them worked very hard. I must say I was privileged to go on the first two Battle of the Atlantic pilgrimages when I was in the department, over to England, with Merchant Navy veterans. It was just such a privilege for me to hear their stories, as well as the Navy personnel who were there and to have them included with the group, it was really wonderful to be part of that history.

THE CHAIR: Sid Prest.

SIDNEY PREST: From your past records, is there any indication how many veterans or families did not apply or receive assistance for one reason or the other?

KRISTA LOCKE: We do have the number of applications received. The applications approved were almost 2,300; those were the veterans we were able to assist with the compensation package. We don't know how many could have applied and didn't, we don't have those numbers.

SIDNEY PREST: Until this was really made public there were a lot of Merchant Navy veterans who didn't realize that they were entitled to this.

KRISTA LOCKE: That's right, and as Lorraine said, it was a big communication blitz at the time and we worked through the various associations to try to get the word out, but it was really up to each merchant mariner to submit an application.

SIDNEY PREST: Were they tried to be tracked down at all and notified personally?

LORRAINE GAILEY: Yes, in fact, for everyone who applied there was quite a challenge to actually get documents for proof of service and actually where they were, to establish if they were in what was deemed to be dangerous waters and so forth. We had staff out of our Newfoundland subregional office that worked very hard on that because some of them out of Newfoundland, of course, were not part of the Canadian military or Canadian infrastructure, it was pre-Confederation. There was a huge effort to work closely and try to get as many people as possible, yes.

THE CHAIR: I think it's important to recognize that although the fight was a long one and it's very unfortunate that it did take until the 1990s to right a very severe wrong and whether we agree with whether the righting was sufficient, I think we have to thank goodness that it did, in fact, take place in the 1990s and the fact that a long battle by many people did come to a successful end to some degree, so I think we have to go on

record.

I think as a committee it would be fair to say that the recognition should continue in the form of collection of memorabilia and the recognition of just how important the Merchant Navy was to the war effort. I don't think that we could underscore enough the importance that the Merchant Navy had. I think it would be unanimous that this committee would go on record, that every effort should be made in the future to continue to recognize the service. As indicated, the average age of those who did serve is now 86. Certainly for those who are remaining and the descendants of those who are remaining, that recognition should continue. Thank you very much for coming in.

KRISTA LOCKE: Thank you and thank you for the invitation.

THE CHAIR: We look forward to getting those statistics. I know it's very hard to be hit with questions that involve statistics.

KRISTA LOCKE: We try to anticipate them and have all the numbers but there are always some that you have to go back to get and that's fine.

THE CHAIR: While you are preparing to put your things together, we won't take an official break but we will allow the chairman and others to replenish coffee.

LORRAINE GAILEY: I should point out that although the average age of veterans is 86, many who served in the Merchant Navy were well established in their career, would have been in their 40s and 50s, so that's also why the numbers are really declining on that side.

THE CHAIR: An excellent point, thank you very much.

[9:39 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[9:42 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: For what was not an official break, we have sort of turned it into one. We will now move on to setting the agenda and selection of witnesses.

Now each caucus has, in fact, submitted a list. I'm wondering if we can take one from each caucus and set a priority on those three and move on from there. That will give the clerk an opportunity to line up witnesses over the next three or four months and it will probably be even four and running into five months if we're not going to meet when the House is sitting. That should take us through a period of time, those three. It is entirely up to you so I throw it open to committee members.

Is it agreed, we'll proceed with one from each caucus? Ok, input in relation to each caucus.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Chairman, would you like me to make a recommendation from our list from our caucus?

THE CHAIR: Sure, by all means.

ALLAN MACMASTER: How about the Royal Canadian Legion Command and condition of buildings?

THE CHAIR: I think that would be very appropriate, considering the new program. That new program was in fact, I believe, the result of the work of this committee. It was certainly put forward from this committee.

WAYNE GAUDET: Mr. Chairman, I'm just curious if members would agree, if we go ahead and agree to invite somebody from the Royal Command, that we also invite somebody from Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations to also provide us with an update on their new program; how many applicants.

I know from the Legion at home, I was speaking with our President and when the news came out they were jumping, they were overjoyed. However, I'm sure we're not the only ones who are facing financial difficulties to come up with the \$10,000, so unfortunately they can't apply this year. I'm just wondering if we could maybe agree to invite somebody from the department to provide us with some background, what have they heard from Legions around the province?

[9:45 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: I believe that would be most appropriate. Do we have agreement on that from the committee?

In relation to that, I had at the beginning of this year two Legions in my constituency. One of them, the Eureka Legion, lost its charter. The other one, the Westville Legion, is having difficulty and was delighted with this program but it needed assistance in getting the application put together and in. It's a Legion that is struggling both monetarily and from a membership perspective. I think there are many others out there as well so I think an excellent choice, Allan, thank you.

WAYNE GAUDET: On behalf of our caucus, I would submit that we consider inviting somebody from the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre. They are often in the news but I can't remember them ever being invited by this committee.

KIM LANGILLE (Legislative Committee Clerk): Something tells me they were years ago but not recently, I don't believe.

WAYNE GAUDET: That would be my suggestion.

THE CHAIR: I think from a Liberal caucus, that would be a very good one to put forward, the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre. I think that would be embraced by all members as well.

WAYNE GAUDET: I'm glad you agree. (Laughter)

THE CHAIR: Is there agreement with that?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. This is a most agreeable committee, I wish they all worked like this.

WAYNE GAUDET: Don't they? (Laughter)

THE CHAIR: No comment. So, the NDP caucus. Certainly the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman has gotten so much play in recent times but it's up to committee members to put forward whatever one wants.

MICHELE RAYMOND: I think that's probably a pretty appropriate one, given the current focus on this and some of the changes that appear to be pending at the moment.

THE CHAIR: I wonder if we would be able to get the outgoing ombudsman to appear before this committee. That might be the most well-attended one that we ever had, from a media perspective.

MICHELE RAYMOND: He may have a very lively speaking schedule.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Burrill, you had a suggestion that I thought was very interesting, from an historical perspective. It's not on our list but I think we should address it as a committee sometime. Would you like to relate that?

GARY BURRILL: I guess it would just be a matter of adding something to the subjects that our caucus might nominate. There is an issue which I think it would be useful for us to think about at some point, that has to do with a much-neglected, very small group of unrecognized Second World War POWs from Nova Scotia. Those POWs have all now passed away who were interned by the Government of Canada during the early 1940s, under what were called then the Defence of Canada Regulations.

In all the attention that has gone in recent years to righting some of the wrongs about various national groups during internment programs in World War I and World War II and the apologies issued, one thing that has never been dealt with is the Canadian anti-fascists who were interned and made prisoners of war between 1940 and 1942 by the

Canadian Government. There were only three Nova Scotians in that group, but they were very important Nova Scotians. Two of them are very important figures in our political history - participants in the Independent Labour Party and the Labour Progressive Party as candidates for office.

I think it would be interesting and worthwhile for us to hear the story of the Nova Scotian POWs under the Defence of Canada Regulations and to consider whether or not we would think it would be worthwhile to call upon the federal government to issue some form of recognition if not apology for the wrong that was done at that time. I'd like to nominate that as a matter to come forward, whether you thought it was a good idea.

MICHELE RAYMOND: I would be very interested to hear more about that, for sure.

THE CHAIR: Is there agreement to look at that at some time, maybe as part of a meeting? Is it agreed?

It is agreed. Thank you.

MICHELE RAYMOND: Do you know anyone to speak to it?

GARY BURRILL: Well, there would be some people who have done some research on it; you would probably need to have a historian do it. I can think of two or three who would be qualified.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps we could allocate an hour of a meeting down the road to hear that story. Is that agreed? Thank you. There is a question, Gary, in relation to the names of the Nova Scotians who, in fact, were involved.

GARY BURRILL: I only have two of the three in my mind - one was Charlie Murray and another was Joe Wallace. Joe Wallace was the uncle of the late Ron Wallace, and Charlie Murray was the brother of Dr. Ed Murray, who was the physician of the Manning Pool of the Merchant Navy during the war. Their family was very involved in the Manning Pool in the 1940s. He was also the brother of Dr. Florence Murray, who was one of the most well-known Presbyterian missionaries from Nova Scotia, so they're interesting people in Nova Scotian history. Both of them - with the third person from Pictou County, whose name I can't come up with - were interned by the federal government for a time just short of two years during World War II.

THE CHAIR: I think that would be very interesting and you had also mentioned one time about the war in Spain where so many Canadians did, in fact, serve and they were serving not in an official capacity, but from an historical perspective that is something of interest as well.

GARY BURRILL: Am I allowed two nominations on the same day for our list?

THE CHAIR: Maybe we'll have an historical day sometime to right a couple of wrongs and recognize some of those who have never been recognized probably before any committee.

GARY BURRILL: Dealing with the second matter, Nova Scotia had a significant recruitment in the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion in the Spanish Civil War. In fact, with the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, joining it was illegal in the 1930s. The government didn't support the effort, but it was the original effort to stave off the advance of fascism, in the battle against Franco in the 1930s. The last Nova Scotian veteran of the Mac-Paps passed away in the 1980s but the Mackenzie-Papineau - oh, I forget the exact name of the association but there is an association of people and their descendants and so on who have, much like the merchant mariners, pressed over the years for the federal government to recognize the battalion's contribution to the Spanish Civil War as one of the conflicts in which Canadians have officially been engaged. That recognition has always been denied.

In my view, it is a mistake and it would be appropriate to think about whether we would wish to bring forward the case of the Nova Scotia Mackenzie-Papineau veterans, to press it forward to the federal government as a matter that should be recognized in the official list of Canadian conflicts.

THE CHAIR: I think it's very important, from a Hansard perspective, that we already have your comments on record today. Now that's not an official recognition but at least it is a mention of two forgotten areas and I think that's very important. Perhaps some day, with the concurrence of members from other Parties, we could, in fact, have an historical/leftist day. (Laughter)

GARY BURRILL: I want to assure the whole committee that while I'm here, whatever else we're having, we're having a leftist day. (Laughter)

THE CHAIR: Thank you, and that's from a committee that prides itself in not being political. Thank you very much.

We have some great suggestions for future meetings and I think that recognition is very important and thank you for the historical bent that you have put on both of those matters.

Do we have a suggestion from the NDP caucus for number one? Are we in agreement that the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman is, in fact, the most current of issues? Is there agreement? Is there agreement from the other Parties?

It is agreed. Thank you.

So we have three that have been identified: the Office of the Veterans

Ombudsman, the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre and the Royal Canadian Legion Command and condition of buildings, which would also include representation from the government department that is involved with the new program. Which of the three should we be looking at first for our first - is there general agreement?

WAYNE GAUDET: Let's leave it to the clerk to decide, whoever is available first.

THE CHAIR: General agreement?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, that's a very fair way of doing it.

Moving along, certainly the submarine tour, which we are hoping to do, one of interest to all of us and it gets us away from the formal setting that we have here, I think it was a very good suggestion; I think it came from Wayne Gaudet, if I remember correctly. We should incorporate that very soon.

We were going to do it in September and there were difficulties with the scheduling of that. Do we have sort of agreement that we could have that, not to cut into our meetings but on some day that the clerk is able to come up with and that it is an aside from our meetings, but perhaps on a Thursday as well? So is there general agreement on that and as soon as possible and hopefully, before the House opens. Is that . . .

KIM LANGILLE: I doubt that's going to happen. They're not available until late October, early November, so that may be a problem.

THE CHAIR: Okay, after the House is finished then, thank you.

Now, correspondence from Minister Peterson-Rafuse; a follow-up from November 26th meeting. We needed some clarification on whether the minister had actually responded to our initial letter. This is an issue that has been raised with previous governments and, in fact, over two and a half years ago, it was raised on January 10th, 2008, and there has been a consistent response over the years that the program does calculate the monies that they have coming in in relation to disability pensions. We could, in fact, go back to the Legion Command - they got a copy of the letter that we received from the minister - and indicate to them, did this answer the question that you actually raised with us, if you want to do it that way.

[10:00 a.m.]

We were uncertain as a committee on whether the question was actually answered to our satisfaction. I think it was Gary Burrill who, in fact, raised that issue. Is that a good approach to take, to go back to the Legion and say this is the response that we got and the response has been given in January 2008, and so on as well, and we want to know your

current feelings in relation to this?

There were some concerns that were expressed as well about some of the programs that calculate an allowance for snow removal, lawn care, and so on that some veterans are getting. That was a situation in my constituency as well, where that was actually calculated in relation to the monies for roof repair and such programs. It was very unfortunate that one veteran whom I was dealing with did, in fact, just go over the amount to qualify for that program by something in the order of - I don't remember the exact amount but it was \$180-some or \$280-some. I believe it was less than \$300, it was some time ago, but I found that to be very unfair as well from a program perspective. I think there are a few things that we have to find the answers to and maybe dealing with the Command is the way to do it. Is that agreed? Okay, agreed.

You've all had an opportunity to have a look at the annual report. I would like to commend Kim in the very beginning for an excellent job. When I read through mine, I made a note, which I haven't shared with her - good job, I put on it, after I read it in my constituency office. Better than that, I think it was a great job and I commend her for doing that. She actually told me this morning as the first person arriving here, which was very unusual, that I deserved a sticker, so it's amazing that you mentioned that as a person who came in just as the meeting was starting. I was here at 8:30 a.m. believe it or not. Anyhow, a job well done.

There was one suggestion for a change and that came from Gary Burrill. I think, Gary, you had suggested a change to it?

GARY BURRILL: This was only about the same question about this ongoing matter about calculation, the use of whatever this means, disability benefits, in calculating social housing program income. I just thought it might be better if our report indicated that this was not finally disposed of, it kind of reads as though the matter was dealt with, but, in fact, it wasn't concluded in the way the other things were concluded. Kim suggested to me that since that's really an ongoing matter maybe it would be better to put it in following reports.

KIM LANGILLE: I guess there are two ways we could handle it. As I suggested, that would be something that would go in the next report that it was a continuation, whatever has been decided, or I could certainly insert, and I have, just in case it was decided here, I put a little sentence in after the part that talks about the correspondence that came back from the minister. The sentence I inserted was: The response provided by Minister Peterson-Rafuse is receiving further consideration by the committee.

THE CHAIR: Is that agreed? Agreed. It's an excellent approach, thank you.

KIM LANGILLE: Okay.

THE CHAIR: We have to have signatures on that, so we'll have an official motion

to approve it. Could someone make that motion, please?

WAYNE GAUDET: Mr. Chairman, on behalf of our committee, I so move that we approve our annual report for the Veterans Affairs Standing Committee of the House for 2010.

ALLAN MACMASTER: I second that motion.

THE CHAIR: It has been duly moved and seconded. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Are there any other matters we should be looking at in relation to the annual report? I think we, as a committee, can look at that report and see the number of meetings and the number of issues that we have actually dealt with and take considerable pride in it when you look at the history of this committee over many, many years of meeting perhaps twice a year. We are trying to have monthly meetings and if we get eight meetings in a year, it is, in fact, four times better than what has, in fact, happened in the past. I commend each and every member for the diligence and the good topics that have, in fact, been suggested. On that note is there anything else? We're all getting gold stars today and getting out for good behaviour.

KIM LANGILLE: Just one other comment about the annual report. I think I mentioned this in the e-mail that I circulated around - the front cover page of the annual report may be changing, we're not sure yet. It essentially sort of looked like this previously and there's some thought that that may be revamped. That however doesn't change anything that's in the report, so it may be that we have a fancier cover page when it gets printed. That remains to be seen at the moment.

THE CHAIR: I would suggest that regular committee members, and we do have three absent today, if you could stay for just a moment to put your signature on this after we adjourn, it would be most appropriate.

Are there any other matters that we should be dealing with? Certainly, our next meeting date is suggested here and it is October 14th and I don't think any of us have a problem with that, it's our standard meeting day. Is there any comment in relation to October 14th for our next meeting?

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

Could we have a motion to adjourn, if there is nothing else, that would be most appropriate.

WAYNE GAUDET: So moved.

THE CHAIR: Please stay and sign, thank you.

We are adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:08 a.m.]