

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Thursday, December 13, 2012

Committee Room 1

Organizational Meeting

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Gary Burrill (Chair)
Jim Boudreau (Vice-Chair)
Michele Raymond
Howard Epstein
Lenore Zann
Hon. Wayne Gaudet
Harold Theriault
Alfie MacLeod
Chuck Porter

In Attendance:

Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb
Legislative Counsel



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2012

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIR

Gary Burrill

VICE-CHAIR

Jim Boudreau

THE CHAIR: We'll call ourselves to order. I guess our first item of business is always for the people with the task of making the record to identify ourselves, so maybe beginning with Mr. Epstein, we could do that.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: So an agenda is in front of us. Does anybody have anything that they would like to add to this agenda or anything on it they would like to change? Do we agree with this agenda?

It is agreed.

The first matter is to deal with the setting of an agenda of possible presentations. Mr. Epstein.

HOWARD EPSTEIN: Mr. Chairman, I note that we have maybe four categories of proposals in front of us - that is, each of the three caucuses have put forward a number of suggestions and then we have some requests to come independently. I'm going to suggest that there is a list of about eight, which would take two from each of the lists. I would like to start by outlining the ones that struck me as being particularly appropriate.

Just kind of going through what is a rough approximation of priority: No. 1 from the NDP caucus list would be the HMS Sackville, which is a tour; No. 2 on the list that I'm proposing would be from the Liberal caucus, their No. 7, the Dennis Manuge evidence about veterans' advocacy in a recent federal court ruling; No. 3 would be from the Progressive Conservative caucus, which is the Glooscap Heritage Centre. Just regarding No. 3, I should point out that there is overlap between that and an item on our list, which was the First Nations veterans so I see those as being quite similar.

Going back again, I would see No. 4 as being the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association. This is from the NDP caucus for people following along here about the Veterans Review and Appeal Board; No. 5 would be the first one on the Liberal list, which was about peer bereavement, that is evidence from Jim Davis and Corporal Fevens. Is that correct - is it Fevens? Yes, okay.

No. 6, again moving down to the Progressive Conservative caucus - I'm wondering if it makes sense to combine No. 4 and No. 5 and hear them together? We have here a proposal to look at two particular sites that seem to be similar issues, so my suggestion was we'd think possibly about doing those together.

I think I'm up to six here. Oh yes, and seven and eight would come from the other list; seven would be the tour invitation for the Army Museum at the Citadel and number eight would be the Equitas Society, which also has a request to appear. So just to recap, that's two from each of the caucuses and two from the requests to appear.

Just going back over them again, down the page that appears in front of us: the Equitas Society; the Army Museum; HMCS Sackville; the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association; Jim Davis and Corporal Fevens; Dennis Manuge; the Glooscap Heritage Centre; and then to hear together the Bass River and the Bridgewater proposals. So those are my suggestions. Those struck me as having some balance.

I should also add that since, of course, scheduling is always a bit of a work of art, I would have thought that in line with some of the practice in other committees, that the clerk be given some discretion to try to schedule as people are available. Anyway, that's my proposal here, reading these lists.

THE CHAIR: Yes, we'll consider that a motion, Mr. Epstein?

HOWARD EPSTEIN: Yes, sorry. I so move.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Raymond.

MICHELE RAYMOND: I just note that HMCS Sackville, I think, is probably the same thing which is on the PC caucus list as Canadian Naval Memorial Trust, is that true? I think it's the same thing. No? Okay.

THE CHAIR: But that would be good if it were.

MICHELE RAYMOND: Yes, I believe it is, so okay. So that covers the PC list.

THE CHAIR: Are there other responses to this motion proposal?

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

The motion is carried.

That's grand. Do we understand, just for the clerk's clarity that the second part of that motion means that Kim is to kind of go with sort of a sequential priority but if one is not there, just keep moving down that list of eight and fill in - okay? That's square for you?

KIM LANGILLE: That's great.

THE CHAIR: Okay. I was thinking about scheduling too. I would like to make a proposal for how we do this in the next round. It seems to me it might be easier and use time better if, a couple of months before Labour Day, say, we asked the clerk to send a notice to all three caucuses . . .

JIM BOUDREAU: A couple of weeks, is it?

THE CHAIR: No, a couple of months before Labour Day, asking them to get together a list, with a date that that would be done. Let's say the date would be two weeks before Labour Day, so you would each have six weeks. The caucuses would then have the composite list of all three caucus proposals for three weeks. When we met in September, that thinking, considering of others' proposals, would have been done and we could establish what we're doing now, we could do that in September.

I thought we should have some kind of rough deadlines about this so that Kim would know what dates to kind of shoot for. Does this seem like a general good idea? Then do those dates seem specifically good, two months before, shooting for two weeks before?

Is it agreed?

It's agreed.

Okay, that's great. There's nothing else, then, in the agenda setting/organizational end? Good.

Turning to the correspondence, there's this matter from our last meeting, about the Highway of Heroes. You'll see that Ms. Langille had written, following the last meeting, to Canadian Army Veterans and also, following Mr. Epstein's suggestion, the letter that had

precipitated this discussion - a copy of that is here too. The Canadian Army Veterans have written back with the way that they would like to see it done, choosing what we had called option one - the sign would be commemorating all fallen peacekeepers, soldiers, emergency responders, firefighters and law enforcement officers from or based in Nova Scotia.

Is there anything for us to do other than to transmit this understanding from them to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal and say that this has the committee's recommendation? That's what we'll do, agreed?

MICHELE RAYMOND: I thought he was asking for a decision.

THE CHAIR: There were three things there. The department writes asking the committee's mind. The committee writes the Canadian Army Veterans. They write back and say our mind is option one. So the decision then is that we transmit option one as the committee's recommendation. Are we agreed about that? Okay, great.

Then we have also this letter from Frank Sullivan, which has come in the last couple of days, asking that the committee consider communicating with the VAC and asking their review of the policy change that he outlines in his letter with a recommendation, that he also outlines in his letter, that would be a better policy situation. He's asking us to call for a change and to support the type of change that he has recommended here.

Mr. Epstein.

HOWARD EPSTEIN: I don't know if other members of the committee have had direct experience with the system. As it happens, I've had some small direct experience with it. My late father was a veteran who benefited from this kind of assistance. I know that when he was in his eighties and not entirely well but still living at home, it certainly was helpful for him to have the service, but not be obliged to do anything more really than tap into it.

I regard the suggestion from Mr. Sullivan at the end of paragraph three in which he suggests that instead of having all individual veterans make their own arrangements, that they have the option of making their own arrangements or continuing with the existing system - I have to say, that seems to me quite sensible. Regarding that as the core of his proposal, I would certainly be prepared to endorse his proposal.

I would like to make a motion to that effect to say that the committee would write to the department endorsing this proposal that veterans be provided the alternative option of continuing under the existing system with respect to their cleaning services.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion about Mr. Epstein and Mr. MacLeod's motion? Kim, do you need any more clarity about . . .

MS. LANGILLE: I don't think so.

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

The motion is carried.

Thinking about meeting dates, the second Thursday that we normally land on, Ms. Langille has pointed out to me that in March, it is the March break time when committees don't meet. We could meet the week before and that would make it instead of March 14th, March 7th. Does that seem like a good idea to everybody?

So the second Thursday, straight ahead, except for March when we would do the first Thursday - the second Thursday, when the House is not in, except for March, which is the first Thursday.

Is that agreed?

Okay then, our next meeting will be January 10th, here at 9:00 a.m.

Is that agreed?

Okay. Is there anything else to come to the meeting?

LENORE ZANN: What's happening in February?

THE CHAIR: The second Thursday.

Are we agreed to adjourn?

Agreed - we are adjourned. Thanks, everybody.

[The committee adjourned at 9:16 a.m.]