

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Thursday, June 11, 2015

Legislative Committees Office

Royal Canadian Legion Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command

Re: Ladies' Auxiliaries

&

Agenda Setting

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VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Ms. Pam Eyking (Chairman)
Mr. Ben Jessome (Vice-Chairman)
Ms. Patricia Arab
Mr. Stephen Gough
Mr. Keith Irving
Hon. Alfie MacLeod
Mr. Eddie Orrell
Hon. David Wilson
Hon. Denise Peterson-Rafuse

[Ms. Patricia Arab was replaced by Mr. Brendan Maguire.]
[Mr. Eddie Orrell was replaced by Mr. John Lohr.]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

Ms. Cathleen O'Grady
Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

Royal Canadian Legion Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command

Ms. Jean Marie Deveaux,
Past President

Ms. Valerie Mitchell-Veinotte,
Executive Director



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, JUNE 11, 2015

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Ms. Pam Eyking

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I call this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. I'm Pam Eyking, MLA for Victoria-The Lakes, Cape Breton; and Chairman of the Veterans Affairs Committee.

We're going to be receiving a presentation today from the Royal Canadian Legion in regard to the Ladies Auxiliaries. I ask the committee members to please introduce themselves for the record, by stating their name and their constituency.

[The committee members and witnesses introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you everyone. I'm just going to remind all those here to have their phones turned off or on silent, please. Just for your reference in speaking, we generally wait to be recognized, just for Hansard, so they know who is presenting.

Welcome today, ladies. We can get started with your presentation. I don't know who would like to speak first.

MS. JEAN MARIE DEVEAUX: That would be me, good morning. I'm going to say comrades, ladies and gentlemen, because I know that most of you are members of the Royal Canadian Legion. The Ladies Auxiliary supports the aims and objectives of the Royal Canadian Legion, and their dedicated service enriches the programs and activities of the Legion.

During the 1914 to 1918 war years, as the wounded veterans returned home, women were asked to aid in the recovery by visiting the hospitals, and sending parcels to the hospitalized and to needy families. It was from these dedicated bands of women that the Royal Canadian Legion Ladies Auxiliary began.

The Ladies Auxiliary is a vital and integral part of the work of the Legion. Major contributors to the day-to-day life of Legion branches; Ladies Auxiliaries provide financial and volunteer support to Legion programs. The Royal Canadian Legion Ladies Auxiliary was officially designated in 1926, shortly after the Royal Canadian Legion itself was designated.

The LA, as we call them, is a not-for-profit organization which operates in partnership with the Royal Canadian Legion branches in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Most, but not all of the branches, have Ladies Auxiliaries. The LA is comprised of mothers, wives, daughters, step-daughters, nieces, sisters, granddaughters and great-granddaughters, and widows of Legion members.

In the Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command, branches have opened a Ladies Auxiliary to any woman in the community who is of the age of majority. Any woman who is eligible for membership in the Legion may choose to become a member of the Ladies Auxiliary only, or a member of both organizations. They have their own identity, as set out in bylaw, under the umbrella and approved by their respective branches.

While the veterans were adjusting to coming home and trying to heal from the horrors of war, the women stood beside them ever faithful. They quietly went to the back of the branches and prepared refreshments for the men. They formed their own strong bond. They were largely responsible for the social life of Legion branches, organizing fundraisers, holding bingos, bazaars, themed events and raffles. They began the business of catering to birthdays, weddings, and funerals and many community events. They helped to build Legion walls and Legion buildings and equip them with furniture and appliances.

The ladies began taking part in Remembrance Week, distributing poppies and marching on parade with legionnaires. They have their own colour parties and often step in when, due to work or illness, the colour parties are short.

Ladies Auxiliary members have formed comfort funds. These funds are used to provide personal care items, social and Christmas gifts for veterans in hospitals and in long-term care facilities. They provide breakfast and afterschool programs - even Christmas parties for children, food baskets for the needy and operate meals on wheels programs in their respective communities.

They donate to local charities. They sponsor Girl Guides and Scout troops. They donate thousands of dollars in bursaries to high school graduates every year. In 2014, Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command along with the Ladies Auxiliary gave high school students

\$182,000 worth of bursaries and scholarships to continue their education. In Canada, it was \$1.3 million presented in bursary and scholarship monies by Legions.

They make hospital and home visits to veterans and their widows. They have packed thousands and thousands of shoe boxes to be sent overseas to the troops, containing letters, dry socks, books, newspapers, hard candy and comforts from home.

There are so very many branches that would have had to close their doors were it not for the support of the Ladies Auxiliaries. They have paid light bills, phone bills and more. But it's not all work. The ladies have their own sporting events such as darts, curling, crib, et cetera, which they play at branch, zone and provincial levels.

Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command ladies hold a rally once a year. It started in Canso at Branch 46 in 1965 with 20 branches of ladies in attendance. Held in May, the host branch for 2015 was Breton Branch Ladies Auxiliary in Sydney Mines with 150 ladies attending. The president of Nova Scotia Nunavut Command and three past presidents of the command and many local area politicians came to help them celebrate the 50th Anniversary. These rallies are a way of sharing ideas and celebrating their accomplishments.

Reports are given from each branch and minutes are kept from year to year. The ladies are then treated to a banquet supper, often prepared and served by legionnaires of the branch, followed by entertainment. I was awed watching 97- and 98-year-old women talking about how they still rule the kitchens in their branch - and they do. I don't know where they get the energy.

Each year, crew members of HMCS *Halifax* run from Yarmouth to Sydney fundraising for the Children's Wish Foundation. Royal Canadian Legion branches and Ladies' Auxiliaries along their route provide donations, hot meals and bagged lunches for the runners.

Time marches on. Veterans pass on in a world where technology rules. The volunteer of yesterday is no more. In most households today both parents work at full-time jobs. Kids play in organized sport and they travel - they travel for sport, they travel for education, and there's no time left over. The ladies in our auxiliaries are, for the most part, quite elderly. Like many organizations that rely on volunteers, our branch Ladies Auxiliaries are at a crossroads - where do we go from here?

At the Royal Canadian Legion, we have a whole new generation of veterans who need our support. The capabilities of technology are truly awesome but our veterans deserve, at the very least, the comfort and care we can give them. The human care and commitment is extended through the Royal Canadian Legion Ladies Auxiliaries, perhaps fewer in number but larger in heart. It would be impossible to list all the projects of support by the ladies, there are far too many, but travel with me to a few.

As President of Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command, I had the pleasure of visiting Iqaluit Branch 168 in Iqaluit a couple of times. My executive director accompanied me. The Elders Centre, which was built and maintained by the branch, is a comforting place for the elders to gather. Expenses in Nunavut, if any of you have been there, are totally outrageous: a 50-gram ball of yarn starts at \$13.95. I called on my ladies for unused balls of yarn lying around the house, and soon seven overly-large boxes of yarn were delivered to the centre to some very happy elders, along with some beads, puzzles, and other crafts.

While we were there we were treated to a demonstration by an elderly gentleman on how they play a game with a rabbit's skull and catch it on a stick. It's very, very interesting.

The ladies have taken time to travel far from home to attend seminars to learn more about how the Royal Canadian Legion operates, in order to serve them better. They've gone into the homes of veterans and widows to houseclean while their own homes are left far down the list. They've gotten dirty and happy planting gardens around branches and cenotaphs. They've arranged outings for thousands of veterans and children, and picnics and plays and concerts. They've washed a thousand walls in a thousand branches. They have sewn curtains and tablecloths and dishcloths, but most of all, they have sewn love - love for veterans, community, and country. They are a loving force of dedicated, compassionate women who deserve all the respect we can ever give them.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you Ms. Deveaux. That was most impressive and touching, just to think that your volunteer work reaches well beyond catering to veterans and Legionnaires. I witness it all the time in my communities. I have a huge rural riding, and the Ladies Auxiliary creates sometimes the only foundation a community has for bringing people together and meeting the needs that are not being met in so many areas, so thanks so much for that. It's disheartening to think that it's diminishing. We do have a different face on veterans now. The need is still there, I don't know what that's going to look like, but I know you're a creative and strong bunch of gals and I'm sure that you're going to be part of that story, too, so thank you so much.

We'll move on to questions and answers. Do I have anyone? Mr. Wilson, would you like to start, please?

HON. DAVID WILSON: Thank you, comrades, for being here today. I'm a proud Legion member, and I think I was telling you earlier that I got my 25-year pin last year so it's hard to believe that I've been a member of the Legion for 25 years. But I definitely recognize the importance, especially being from Calais Branch 162 which I believe is still one of the largest, if not the largest, in the province - a lot of great work from the members and members from your organization, the Ladies Auxiliary.

You are the face of the Legion. Your members are playing an important role in the Legion, and not only on the auxiliary. Many of them are Legion branch presidents, treasurers, secretaries - they play an important role. Thank you for that.

I'm glad you mentioned Nunavut. I did have a chance to go to Iqaluit and I don't know if members know the connection with Nunavut, but Nova Scotia reached out when Nunavut was looking for a command to join because they were too small and Nova Scotia was more than willing to play a role. If you're from Nova Scotia and you're a Legion member and you find yourself in Iqaluit, you just have to say that word and they treat you amazingly well. I, too, recognize the cost up there not only for yarn, but for food and there are huge challenges so thank you for that work.

You mentioned a couple of the challenges you face. Can you maybe be a little more specific on what are the biggest challenges today for your organization? Is there anything that we can do as a committee to support you or to advocate for you? We always offer that to the organizations that come forward. I know there are two questions in there, but I'll leave that and I don't know which comrade would like to answer.

MS. VALERIE MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: We always welcome the opportunity to have people learn more about our organization. You and I discussed actually before the meeting that unlike the popular opinion that is out there, there are younger faces to the Royal Canadian Legion, people who, though cannot necessarily dedicate the time in the same way as our predecessors, our older members, can donate that time, but we would welcome the opportunity to appear before this committee to make a presentation on the Royal Canadian Legion, itself. We welcome the opportunity to discuss our Ladies Auxiliary today, but we would very much appreciate the opportunity to present the breadth of our organization and through that knowledge, hopefully each of you will become more aware of the support and our outreach to veterans that is very timely and very relevant to the veteran today and their families. So I hope that answers a couple of questions.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Definitely.

MS. DEVEAUX: In that line just for your information, Valerie Mitchell-Veinotte is the daughter of a service member formerly and her son, Josh, is a returning veteran from Afghanistan. Those of us who work with the veteran are very cognizant of what they need and what their needs are. My own son is a reservist, a medic which he has been for 25 years and loves it.

The Legion's demographics have changed, everything has changed and we all have to realize that nowadays there are too many organizations needing volunteers and not enough volunteers to go around. However, branches are trying to adapt as best they can. The ladies, of course, are rounding up the men and teaching them how to do things that they never thought they would have to learn to do. However, in my own community we have very few Afghan veterans; I'm from a more rural community. In Ms. Eyking's

community there are a lot of reserve veterans, as she well knows. In Halifax there are a lot of reserve veterans, returning veterans and a lot of personnel still in the service.

There are services that we can offer them to help them manage the red tape to get the help they need, that is one of the things that we are working on diligently. We even have an outreach transition program which provides caring. The first thing it provides is a backpack filled with needs for homeless veterans and a little note in them, call this number, just torn off. The backpacks are filled with blankets and personal care items. We also have to find these people and reach out to them.

The Legion has been well known for years for not saying what they do, in a sense. If you belong to a Legion, you know that. We don't advertise that we fill wheelbarrows or replace stoves for widows or do driveways, et cetera. So I think educating the public a little more on that would help us quite a bit. A lot of people don't understand what "Legion" is. They think you have to have either been in the service or have a parent in the service to belong.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Irving.

MR. KEITH IRVING: Thank you for your presentation. I can't help but share with you my connection. I lived 20 years in Nunavut and was a member of the Legion there, but I am an architect and I designed the Elders Centre facility. It was one of the first buildings I did in Iqaluit, in about 1987.

I can't say enough about the Legion - working with them and the elders. It was a gentleman by the name of Pat Murphy - I think he has since passed away - from P.E.I. who I worked with from the Legion up there. The message was, give the elders whatever they want. That building in 1987 was, I believe, \$485,000, which today would probably be \$2 million or something - every penny paid for by the Legion. The Legion up there does tremendous work in the community with building daycares and buses, et cetera.

Anyway, thank you for sharing that story because it's a big part of my life up there. Maybe my question would be, could you expand a bit more on the connection between the Nunavut Legion and Nova Scotia? Maybe you'd like to focus a bit on the Ladies Auxiliary, given the topic today, but could you share with us more about that connection?

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: I think it should be noted though at the outset that Comrade Deveaux is the immediate past-president of Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command and not a member of the Ladies Auxiliary, but the Ladies Auxiliary, of course, falls under our purview as Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command.

The Territory of Nunavut felt that they did not within our organization have effective representation at the national level when it came to taking stands on issues so reached out to other commands within the country, looking to forge a bond and to join.

They approached Nova Scotia and it was as easy as that - we welcomed them with open arms.

I have to congratulate you on the design of that Elders Centre building. You feel the peace as soon as you walk in the front door. It's wonderful, and the view of the bay, right on the beach. Job well done, sir.

MR. IRVING: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. We're going on to Mr. Lohr.

MR. JOHN LOHR: Thank you for the presentation. Certainly my interactions with the Legions in Kentville and Canning - I know the Ladies Auxiliary does fantastic work there.

I just want to follow up on something you said earlier about Afghan veterans. I'm just wondering, in terms of your interaction with the Afghan veterans, do you find that they are coming to the Legion or they're sort of unaware of what the Legion has to offer? Do you have to reach out to them or are they reaching out to you? How is that going, connecting with these Afghan veterans?

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: We have an extensive veterans outreach program that, of course, we reach out to all veterans, but the main thrust of that particular program is to reach out to a different generation of veterans. We don't isolate the Afghan veterans from any other veteran, but there is a population that falls between the Bosnia era to the Afghanistan veteran.

We have many veterans in that era who present directly to us. We are well known in the veteran community for advocacy and the services we can offer through our service bureau in assisting veterans applying for entitlements and benefits.

The elder veteran for the most part is already in receipt of those entitlements and benefits. Their situations may change whereby those benefits and entitlements need to expand as they age or their needs change so the majority of that age of veteran that would include the Afghan veteran are approaching us for assistance right from first application.

We operate through our Veterans Outreach Program very appropriate supports for that age group. They fall mostly within the umbrella of mutual support and peer support. We offer a trauma relapse prevention program in HRM and are looking to expand that throughout the province. We work closely with OSISS, with the Military Family Resource Centres, the IPSCs and very many other veterans' organizations, UN-NATO Veterans Association, the Commissionaires. Actually we have a wonderful partnership with the Commissionaires as well as RUSI and VETS Canada.

We actually spearheaded a working group about three years ago to bring all those organizations together and other individuals in the community, various clinicians and medical practitioners, to identify duplicity of service. That included Veterans Affairs Canada. So three years ago we identified that duplicity where that was happening so that we could all streamline. Basically what happens is we end up being the central point of all the other veterans' organizations but again, we have individuals for the most part who present directly to us.

Membership in that age group is somewhat of a challenge for those individuals to become members of our branches. For the most part, if they wish to become members, and they often do, they become members of our Command branch, which is like a holding branch until they decide what branch to go to. The challenge, of course, is that a lot of people we see and offer support to face the challenge of substance addictions or other types of addictions and they don't necessarily feel comfortable in our clubhouses yet. We do face that challenge in that age group.

MR. LOHR: You must find, and you kind of hinted right at the end - I was thinking there must be sort of a whole different set of demands or issues with the younger vets versus the older vets. It must be stretching your organization to be trying to address the group that you knew very well and are very comfortable with and now you have a younger group of veterans that pool on your resources. You shared a lot of different groups you are working in partnership with. Have you felt that that has, even in a time of maybe decreasing volunteerism, is that sort of placing new demands on your organizations?

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: Let me be very clear - the purposes and objectives of the Royal Canadian Legion have not changed since 1926 and are as relevant today as they were in 1926. Despite the common belief that our numbers and our membership is - if you listen to the buzz out there - dramatically decreasing, that is not the case. We maintain a very healthy membership within Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command. It has remained steadily around the 23,000 to 24,000 member mark in the four years that I have been with the Command. Nationally we still stand at about 330,000 members in Canada. What has changed is the amount of time that our members can actually give to the programs and to the branches, so that's the phase that has changed.

Of course we do have, within Nova Scotia especially, a large population of veterans per capita. We have to remember, too, that our definition of a veteran includes serving members and because we, through our service bureaus, can offer the same services because we have a special partnership with Veterans Affairs Canada, because we can offer the same services as case managers at Veterans Affairs and the staffing issues, which you're all aware have been a challenge for all through Veterans Affairs, our workload has increased in representing veterans right from first application through to the Veterans Review and Appeal Board process.

The answer is yes, we are facing challenges within our organization to deal with the needs of the “newer veteran,” but only because we have a high population of veterans and serving members who are injured and have entitlements due to them and the decrease in staffing with Veterans Affairs.

My understanding is - and we receive good statistical information from across the country on a regular basis through our national organization - in Nova Scotia we have one of the highest caseloads for case managers at Veterans Affairs in the country. I meet regularly with the district office staff, and we deal with them sometimes on a daily basis, and the complexity of the cases that they’re dealing with is increasing. We, too, have to remember that the increasing complexity of cases, with mental health issues now long being determined and finally recognized as an injury, has changed the face of the caseloads that we’re all dealing with.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jessome.

MR. BEN JESSOME: Madam Chairman, I would also like to focus on the concerns with respect to volunteers. It’s nice to hear that the numbers are still consistent, I guess, and maybe there are ways to address how much time people can take, but certainly we all know how busy life gets so I agree it’s important to highlight the importance of what you’re doing and how people can commit to your views and your initiatives.

My apologies as I can’t remember which one of you made the comment with respect to the presence of young people in the Legions throughout the province and throughout Nunavut, under your purview. I’m wondering how you’re focusing on recruiting the next generation of volunteers and I ask that you kind of highlight some of your focused work with respect to hiring young volunteers.

MS. DEVEAUX: We are attending more and more public events where people will get to know us and get to know what we do, setting up booths and Canada Day celebrations and the MRFC, military day at the docks, et cetera. Word of mouth is seeming to help us a bit now. For instance, when the Afghan veterans come back, of course, their age range is maybe 20 to 30 years, maybe younger. They don’t know a lot about the Legion, but I find that someone who knows them or the Legion will say, well, why don’t you call Joe Blow down the street, he’s got something to do with the Legion and he’ll be able to tell you where to go? That’s getting people to the point that we can go in and help get them to the VAC process.

So hopefully - and as a younger person yourself - we are beginning in the branches to try to offer things they would like, like free Wi-Fi and video games and stuff that they would be more interested in, rather than playing tarabish with us or darts and things like that. We are moving in that direction quite a bit, or trying to.

The other thing is, like most people we're going to SCAN seminars quite a bit and trying to make ourselves more out in the public. In my own community, how very often you're at the mall or some place and somebody will say, oh you know, call that one, the one from the Legion - which is usually myself or Valerie - for information. If we don't have the answer for them, we make sure we get it.

I've had one instance where a neighbour called one of my colleagues knowing he belonged to the Legion and said, our son is in the basement since two months, we don't know what to do and we're afraid he's going to go suicide. So he said, well, just hold on, and he called a counsellor. He called the parents back and asked, would he be willing to talk to me if I came in? Between them - they had him and the counsellor - they had him in a program within two weeks. If we can outreach to these people and they can outreach to us, it helps. I think the younger generation will get to know us a little better than a bunch of old veterans sitting around telling stories, sort of thing.

I have to tell you, times change so much and I was amazed - I was at a Christmas party at Stadacona and they had the veterans from Camp Hill, and I had some with me, and they had a lot of service personnel. We had six young Navy personnel - new to the Navy, I assumed, they looked quite young. They were from all different areas of the country. I had with me a World War II Devil's Brigade veteran from my own hometown who I know quite personally. I was so proud and I said, this is Hector MacInnes - he's Devil's Brigade. What's that? I said, what do you mean, what's Devil's Brigade? I said, you've never seen the movie The Devil's Brigade? No, what's that?

I actually was appalled that our children don't know this. We've lost something. We have to be better educated about what our service does for us - what our servicemen and women do for us. I mean, everybody here knows what Devil's Brigade is.

MR. JESSOME: Not the member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville. (Interruptions)

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jessome is in his 20s.

MS. DEVEAUX: Then, Mr. Jessome, my suggestion to you is to Google it, find out exactly what it is and what they have done, because it's one of our best stories.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Deveaux. Mr. Wilson.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I was just going to say you should have told the young service personnel to Google it and they probably would have found out within seconds. Thank you for sharing some of those stories with us.

I have two questions around the workload you have now and the service officers. I know our branch is always working hard and the effects of some of the cuts and the closures of the Veterans Affairs offices, I think I heard from you that you are seeing an increase in

the workload. It's ironic, I mean the service officers are volunteers and they work extremely hard and they help with complex cases. As an MLA, I've worked on a number of cases and I've always been able to either get it solved or get them on the right track with contact in the service office in Sackville.

You mentioned you have good data, is that data available? It would be good for our committee if you could provide information on what the caseload is, just so we know. I think that is such a strong message and I think it helps with us interacting with our own community members, saying do you realize that the Legion, they may be volunteers but they have this as a caseload. Is that information that you could provide us? Not the specific information but what is your caseload for the branches, is that something you could provide to the committee?

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: I would be more than happy to forward that through my contact with Kim.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Perfect, I appreciate that.

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: Just to add to that, it is good data in that it actually breaks down the type of assistance as well. At its basis our organization is a benevolent organization so we can provide a breakdown in benevolent assistance, which includes emergency assistance right down to what type of representation we made to Veterans Affairs for the individuals. So sure, I am happy to provide that, thank you for asking for it.

MR. DAVID WILSON: My last question - with that increased caseload, have you received any additional support from Veterans Affairs or the federal government? Are they recognizing the ramifications of some of the decisions of closing offices that has an impact on your organization? Have you received any additional support? If not, have you requested additional support from Veterans Affairs or the federal government itself?

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: Of course at every level within our organization we are advocating for expanded services, never mind an acceptable level of service through Veterans Affairs Canada to all veterans. I would like you to be aware of the fact that the Royal Canadian Legion receives no financial or any other kind of support from the Government of Canada to actually carry out basically the same work as Veterans Affairs case managers.

As a matter of fact, we even have to supply the ink cartridges for printers that Veterans Affairs insist be used solely and only to actually print off the forms, because it is such a secure network - although through a printer I am not sure how that happens but I'm not that technologically bright, I guess. Of course we incur costs.

The service officers are volunteer at our branch level but at the Command level we have on our staff a professional service officer, so the costs associated with that position

and to carry out that work have to come from poppy funds, which are raised annually through our Poppy Campaign. So there is no financial support from Veterans Affairs Canada in our work.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Maguire.

MR. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Thank you for coming today. We do have a very active Legion in Spryfield, I try to make it once a month. One of the things they do which I think is fantastic is they have monthly - and we discussed this earlier - they have a monthly seniors' dance and an dinner - well they call it a dinner but I think it starts at one o'clock so it's not exactly a dinner. I try to show up all the time. I bring my two-year-old son with me and it's funny because none of them actually pay attention to me, they just run around with my son.

I just wanted to follow up on the mental health stuff but I also wanted to just tell a quick story. When I was going through high school and college - right toward the end there, I was working at a restaurant and there was a gentleman there, Mr. Cormier would have been probably in his 80s at the time. He had been retired for a long time and he would come back to the kitchen and cook with me, showing me ways that they cooked when he was younger which you would never get away with now.

I asked him one time why he joined the military and he told me he got off a steamboat in New York and he went to a bar, and he was only 15 or 16 at the time and he said he went to a bar for a bite to eat, and there was a guy that came in and sat down beside him and he was all beat up. He looked over at him and said, what happened to you? He said oh, you know, I just got into a fight and he said, do you want me to buy you some dinner and the guy said no, that's fine. He asked Mr. Cormier what he did for a living and he said I don't know, I'm just trying to wander around and figure out what I want to do in life. He said, what should I do and the guy said, you should join the military. The guy was Jack Dempsey, heavyweight champion of the world. He said there is nothing more honourable than joining the military. Mr. Cormier said that was the reason he joined the military so it is stories like that when you hear them and pass those stories down - and Mr. Cormier passed away quite some time ago and I always wanted him to write a book because he led quite an interesting life.

With the mental health stuff I wanted to know now that it's becoming more acceptable - because I think for long periods of time, people just suffered in silence - is that having a huge impact on the caseloads that you guys are seeing and how are you dealing with them? I'm assuming veterans of the Great Wars probably didn't complain about mental health as much as, I shouldn't say complain, but they didn't seek help for mental health issues as much as we do today because we recognize now that this is as debilitating as a physical injury.

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: One of the initiatives through our Veterans Outreach Program - I already mentioned the Trauma Relapse Prevention Program - is that we formed a partnership about three and a half years ago with a decorated Canadian hero, Medric Cousineau. We actually helped Medric receive a service dog to assist him in living his life with post-traumatic stress disorder, so we formed a partnership with Medric to initially raise funds and awareness to provide 50 service dogs for 50 veterans. I'm happy to say that we're almost at 90 with that and it certainly is a method of assisting those living with mental health issues to lead more productive, satisfying, healthier lives. That is but one initiative.

We spoke earlier about membership and how we're actually trying to promote membership and gain more members. We feel that if we communicate and act relevant in today's veteran world that that's really the only way that we can promote membership. One of those initiatives to deal with mental health issues is the Paws Fur Thought and the service dogs for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder. Another program is the Trauma Relapse Prevention Program. We have offered three veterans transition programs in Nova Scotia, the first in the country outside of British Columbia.

Every program and everything we do focuses on outreach to those struggling with the areas of their health that there is sort of the intangible access too, unlike a physical injury, there are scooters and other medical appliances. Hopefully, that answers your question. Yes, the mutual support groups which I mentioned earlier, as well.

MR. MAGUIRE: The other question that I had is, when a veteran passes away and let's say they have no family, what happens to their medals? It's a valuable piece of history, and I'm hoping that they're not sold. It's something for the veterans who have family - they pass it down - but what happens when somebody passes away with no family and they have these valuable medals that they earned?

MS. DEVEAUX: A lot of the time, if the veteran belonged to the Legion, the family will donate them to the Legion where they are encased in a box, in memorabilia rooms with the names, et cetera.

We usually have a very good connection with the funeral homes in our communities and if the veteran is alone, like you say, with no one, oftentimes the funeral home will connect with us and say, what should we do - and then we'll come to a solution. However, if they're out there, we have gone looking and we have actually purchased medals back, but there's no way for us to legally take those.

I know exactly what you mean and it is a shame, but is a part of life that we can't control.

MR. MAGUIRE: It's a valuable piece of history.

MS. DEVEAUX: It's a very valuable piece of history, yes it is.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Gough.

MR. STEPHEN GOUGH: Thank you for your presentation this morning - very informative. My experience with the Ladies Auxiliary has been more in the church and they do wonderful things as well. They are very busy, for sure.

I was wondering, does the Ladies Auxiliary work with any other military support groups outside of the Legion?

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: The Ladies' Auxiliaries in our branches tend to work within the boundaries of the local branches. The Royal Canadian Legion works with other organizations - varied, everything from other community organizations like the Lions or the Kinsmen, support sports groups and youth activities and our own youth programs, as well as other organizations that are sort of veteran and military related.

MR. GOUGH: That's very good, thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Lohr.

MR. LOHR: I was just thinking we should say something and I would like to commend you on the dollar value of the bursaries given. I know I've attended a number of graduations and the Legion will have someone at the graduation giving bursaries to students. I just think it's an amazing program and we'd be remiss if we didn't mention it here. You've mentioned it in passing. I know the poppy campaign too. So I guess what I would like to ask about that is just to give you a chance to comment on those. I think they're such wonderful programs, and just tell us where the dollar values are going. I know my own observation is the poppy campaign seems to be gaining momentum, I would say - and just sort of generally the fundraising of the Ladies Auxiliary and the Legion, how you feel it's going.

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: The Ladies' Auxiliaries fall directly under the auspices of each branch so funds raised by the Ladies Auxiliary would stay within the purview of that branch. So if the Ladies Auxiliary decided to raise monies toward bursaries they would contribute that to the local branch and the branch would then award the bursaries.

If the Ladies Auxiliary decided they wanted to raise monies and donate them to the branch to be used to sponsor a student for our youth leadership training camp, then those funds would be used for that purpose. It stays within the purview and the jurisdiction of the branch.

Poppy funds - certainly our Ladies Auxiliaries assist in volunteering in distributing poppies, but they do not raise poppy funds themselves. The branch would raise the poppy funds through the annual poppy campaign. Then poppy funds, outside of the Ladies Auxiliary, because the Ladies Auxiliary doesn't relate directly to the raising of poppy trust funds. Poppy trust funds are set aside, as you likely know, to be utilized for veterans and their families only and for us that includes still-serving members and those transitioning are still considered to be serving members - transitioning to civilian life.

MR. LOHR: Do you have a total dollar value of the fundraising activities of the Ladies Auxiliary or the Legions themselves? I'm just curious.

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: Not at my fingertips, but I certainly have the fundraising and sort of the value of funds held by all our branches but not of the Ladies Auxiliary. They fall directly under the purview of each branch and the Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command has no jurisdiction over the Ladies Auxiliary.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Deveaux, you'd like to add to that?

MS. DEVEAUX: Yes, if I may. Each branch, and as some of you have probably heard at some of their banquets, usually give a cheque to the branch for either a certain project or for the general operation. Some small branches, maybe \$1,000, \$5,000 a year.

The last one I attended in Sydney Mines actually the ladies presented a cheque to the branch for \$44,000 and I've seen it go up as high as \$90,000, from bingos and bake sales, et cetera. I know that Children's Wish, the ladies presented \$1,000 to the runners in one branch and all the along the route they did presentations, as well as the meals.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Deveaux. Yes, Cape Bretoners are incredible fundraisers, I can attest to that, that's right.

We're going to move on to Mr. Wilson.

MR. DAVID WILSON: As you continue to present, we're learning more and more about what you do and what the branches do to support people in the community. One of the ones I am familiar with of course is the Legion Track and Field Championship at the Command and the branch helps out often. I believe it is a 16-and-under track and field meet but it's not just the athletics, they have other components to it that try to build up a young person so it's great to see.

Since you are here, and I know it's not specific with the Ladies Auxiliary but we've had many groups over the last number of months come in and I've asked this question to them, especially around the support for veterans, it's around Camp Hill - has Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command taken a stance on or have they been advocating to change the

criteria to allow more veterans to gain access to Camp Hill, the long-term care beds at Camp Hill?

I know it might be putting you on the spot but it's an important issue that I think is starting to - we're starting to see more and more organizations advocating for that to happen. Has the Command taken a stance or advocated for changing the criteria for access to the long-term care beds at Camp Hill?

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: Absolutely, thank you. Well if you wanted me to expand on that, we certainly recognize that the needs of elderly veterans are changing and mainly that's because of a decline in that particular population and the wish of more and more veterans to remain in their communities or in their homes.

What we recognize as well is that we are quite supportive of recent announcements from Veterans Affairs Canada on the development of an OSI clinic within metro Halifax and we are waiting eagerly to receive factual details on what that is going to look like, if it is to be up and running in October.

We recognize that there's a tremendous amount of funding required not only to establish that clinic but to maintain that clinic and to make it effective and not repeat perhaps inefficiencies in similar systems that have been created across the country. We look at Camp Hill and can only take the experts' word that the facility is not 100 per cent utilized, even if they did change some of the criteria, and wonder why part of that facility could not be utilized to operate the OSI clinic that the federal government has announced that will be operational by October. This is June.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Ms. Deveaux, you wanted to expand on that?

MS. DEVEAUX: First a question, can I go into Cape Breton language right now?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: All right, I'm all for it. (Laughter)

MS. DEVEAUX: Yes, you would be. It's the old pass the buck story - you know, pass the buck, pass the buck. Camp Hill has been turned over to Capital Health, as you know, and we get passed from one department to another, and the runaround will make you silly in the end; however, it is the very same as VAC.

The VAC pays for hospital beds in nursing homes and certain hospitals, as you well know. Now, we've had a situation through our benevolent funds where a very large man was very ill and was in a hospital. The bed was too small so they needed a longer bed which cost - I think it was \$5,500. Anyway, we approached VAC and they're under no obligation to pay for that bed because they pay for the hospital, for the care of the veteran. Well, the hospital can't afford to buy a bed, so where does that leave the veteran? That leaves the Legion buying a hospital bed to be put in a hospital run by the government, subsidize the

room through VAC. Actually, what is going on here? Is it pass the buck or what? You get involved in so much red tape that the poor veteran is so confused.

In Camp Hill, there were all new chairs put in, supplied by the branches of the Royal Canadian Legion. There are lifts, half of that building was donated by the Royal Canadian Legion, yet we have absolutely no say in what happens to that building or the veterans who are in it.

The statistics that come from Ottawa say that Camp Hill isn't needed because it's not full anymore. Actually, what's really true is that veterans are passing quickly, yes, but the wait-list is not as long for Camp Hill as what it was. There are 173 beds and 173 veterans, but instead of waiting two or three years to get a veteran in, you now only have to wait probably two or three months. The World War II veterans are dying at a rate of 80 a day. Thank you.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Just for clarification for some of the members, OSI - could you just explain what that stands for?

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: OSI is an operational stress injury.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We're going to move on to a question from Mr. Irving.

MR. IRVING: You've talked a bit about the challenges with respect to manpower and volunteers as creating some stress for the Legion. I'm just thinking in terms of the challenges in my local branch in Wolfville that they're facing is around infrastructure. A lot of our Legion buildings I presume provincially - and really my question is, the experience in Wolfville of an aging building and a building that's not accessible and their struggles to find funds to upgrade the building and deal with even the basics of the National Building Code and accessibility. So I'm just wondering if you could confirm or expand on whether that is a provincial challenge for the Legions.

MS. DEVEAUX: Yes, it is. I have been in the Wolfville Legion and I know exactly what you're talking about. It has been a challenge and it's an ongoing challenge. Although - and I would have to refer to Valerie for which department it is - we have a Capital Assistance Program provided by the Government of Nova Scotia, which helps a bit, we're always looking for grants or what's available, especially for accessibility at this stage - if that answers your question.

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: I would just like to add to that that Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command, and its Legion branches within our jurisdiction, is very grateful for the Legion Capital Assistance Program, as well as the Community ACCESS-Ability Program, as well as the most recent federal announcement for assistance available to community organizations, such as the Legion, for infrastructure.

MR. IRVING: Just a quick supplementary, and maybe you don't have these numbers in your head, but I'm just trying to get at an order of magnitude of this issue. How many branches do we have with buildings and how many do you suspect would need significant enhancements on accessibility or keeping the water from coming through the roof?

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: We do have 106 branches within our jurisdiction. Not all have buildings, so there are about three within our Command. A lot of our branches are looking at the alternative of actually selling very valuable properties - and large properties - that they own, and looking at alternatives such as leasing in a strip mall or building a more efficient building.

These branches were built at a time when the community's population supported the building. We face within our organization, as we do across the board in the Province of Nova Scotia, a decline in population in many communities. So when we talk about the decline in membership in Royal Canadian Legion branches or the loss of branch buildings and premises, that's also occurring with loss of schools and loss of community health facilities.

I guess the point I'm trying to make is that's not particularly a Legion problem. It's a widespread decline in population, which I'm sure you are all very well aware.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Lohr.

MR. LOHR: I'd just like to follow up on that, on branch closures. One thing that interests me is the fact that there's so much amazing historic memorabilia or artifacts in these branches. I know that in particular - and I think of Kentville, which is a very healthy branch, but they have just an amazing collection of historical artifacts. When a branch does close, what happens to those items? I assume most branches would have quite a bit of memorabilia.

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: Most branches do, and they have history rooms and mini museums. That's one of the things that I thoroughly enjoy when I visit different branches all across the country is to actually have a look through their history rooms.

The same thing as what happened to their members and the veterans at that branch would be responsible for would happen to the memorabilia. That would be donated to a neighbouring branch. A neighbouring branch, when a branch closes or amalgamates with another branch, the members actually transfer. The area providing support to veterans would also be amalgamated with the nearest branch.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: It doesn't appear we have any more questions, so I would ask the witnesses if they have any final comments or closing remarks.

MS. DEVEAUX: I am just very pleased that you asked us here today. I would like to ask Mr. Jessome, did you Google that already?

MR. JESSOME: A done deal.

MS. DEVEAUX: Now you're going to watch the movie, aren't you?

MR. JESSOME: I made a note actually to check out the movie.

MS. DEVEAUX: Do you know why the knives were black?

MR. JESSOME: I didn't get that far into it.

MS. DEVEAUX: If I may, I am going to tell you a little story; these were specially trained servicemen, something like the Green Berets, if you will. Anyway, their knives were blackened so that the Germans wouldn't see them glinting in the moonlight. That's our history and we still have some of those veterans alive.

I'm 30 years in the Legion and I've done a lot of speaking. I'm an associate member, I was never in the military, so I can only talk about what they've told me and what's in my heart. It's totally amazing, it should be in Canadian history books, of course. We learned in my generation, which was a while ago, American history. We didn't recognize our own history, I guess, for some reason.

However, the Legion teaches you compassion and discipline and to work for your fellow man. I know you have on the agenda the letter that we're seeking an audience about the veterans licence plate. We've been doing that for a couple of years. I know it has been busy in the upheaval in Nova Scotia, but hopefully you'll be able to make a little time for us and hopefully you'll have a little better understanding of some of what we do and some of what we will continue to do. Thank you very much, we really appreciate it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Deveaux. Ms. Mitchell-Veinotte, any final remarks?

MS. MITCHELL-VEINOTTE: I would just like to say thank you ever so much for all you do in support of veterans and their families. I thank you, as a daughter of a veteran, the sister of a veteran, and the mother of a veteran.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: And we would certainly like to thank you for all that you do and thank you for your presentation today, thank you very much.

We're going to recess and then continue on with some committee business - five minutes.

[10:13 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[10:24 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, I'm going to call this meeting back to order and we'll go on to committee business.

The first piece of committee business was a motion from Mr. Orrell, and where he's not here today, I think we'll defer that to another day.

Then we had some correspondence from the Royal Canadian Legion, a request to appear. So the committee needs to decide if you'll agree to that request. Is everyone in agreement with that?

MR. LOHR: Can we just go back a second to Eddie Orrell's motion? I will confess I don't know what the motion was. Could you read me the motion?

MS. KIM LANGILLE (Legislative Committee Clerk): There's a copy.

MR. LOHR: I have copy of it here, do I? I was looking through it and I didn't see it. I'm okay leaving that until Eddie's here to speak to it. That doesn't make any sense to me.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, back to the correspondence - for the Royal Canadian Legion to appear. Are we all in favour of having them appear? Mr. Irving.

MR. IRVING: Certainly, Madam Chairman. I see no problem with bringing them back to appear. I would suggest that it would be farther down on the list as opposed to back-to-back meetings. I'd suggest that we make this part of the discussion of the agenda setting and I don't know how many months ahead you would like to set up. I would assume you were thinking of three or something, but if you want to move on to that next agenda item, we could discuss that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Is that okay with everyone? Good. So we will move on to agenda setting. We have a list of potential witnesses here - it has been circulated. I'm going to ask each caucus to pick one from their list and we'll move forward with that. That should give us enough to finish up the year.

Let's start with Mr. Wilson - your caucus has one on the list. So we'll just do a vote on that.

MR. DAVID WILSON: All we're looking for is - when I was minister there were discussions with - well, they weren't discussions. There was correspondence from the federal government saying that they may be divesting the VAC beds to the province. So

the reason for the topic is to see what kind of update from the department on where we're at with that. It can be a huge hit to the province financially if they need to replenish those funds, so that's what that topic is about.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Irving.

MR. IRVING: A very valid topic or question. Is that something that could be answered in a letter? Is it enough of a discussion item to fill an hour or plus?

MR. DAVID WILSON: I would think there are a lot of issues. I think there would be. I mean, the department could maybe respond on that, and if we get a response from the department that indicates something different we can look at it maybe in the first meeting when we meet back in September.

I think it's an issue and I think the department would embrace discussing it - some of the challenges that they may face, so I would think so. I'm more than open to listen to a response from the department to see what they feel and then we can revisit it if we need to in the first meeting in September.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So just for clarification, we'll wait and see what the department's response is and then we'll move forward from there. So we're writing a letter to the department to ask basically what the update would be - the status - and if they would appear.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I would ask if they would be willing to appear to discuss the issue. Just ask them to appear. I guess the department could refuse or give why they wouldn't feel appropriate, but I would still like it on because we're not going to meet again until September.

I'm more than okay to say it's not in the first meeting, but we could put it towards the end and then if we need to revisit it in September, we could, but I would rather have the request go out for them to appear and then just hold it off. Then if we need to revisit it in that first meeting I'm more than willing to look at that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So the request is to ask the department to appear in regard to the residential care policies. Does everyone approve of that? So we're going to go ahead with that. We'll go over to Mr. Lohr - would you like to pick a witness, please?

MR. LOHR: I would pick the first one on our list - Pictou County Heritage Military Museum.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: All right, is everyone in favour of that? Okay, we're good to go.

We'll go to the Liberal caucus - who would like to speak to that? Mr. Irving.

MR. IRVING: I'd like to submit that Helmets to Hardhats join us for a discussion.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, all in favour of that? Okay, we're good to go on that.

What I propose is that we're now good until September and we'll have another agenda-setting meeting as we get closer to exhausting this list. Should we just defer this to the next agenda-setting meeting or add it to the list? We're going to revisit the agenda anyway so we'll just put it on the list to revisit when we have another meeting.

Is that okay? All right, thank you.

Our next probable meeting date would be September 10th - all in favour?

It's agreed. All right, we're good to go.

Thank you everyone, the meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:31 a.m.]