

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**Tuesday, December 15, 2020**

**Via Video Conference**

**Organizational & Agenda Setting**

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## VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Rafah DiCostanzo (Chair)  
Ben Jessome (Vice-Chair)  
Brendan Maguire  
Bill Horne  
Hon. Margaret Miller  
Kim Masland  
Murray Ryan  
Lisa Roberts  
Claudia Chender

### In Attendance:

Judy Kavanagh  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel



House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2020**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**2:00 P.M.**

**CHAIR**

Rafah DiCostanzo

**VICE-CHAIR**

Ben Jessome

**THE CHAIR:** I call this Veterans Affairs Committee meeting to order. My name is Rafah DiCostanzo. I'm the MLA for Clayton Park West. Today we don't have any witnesses, so we will be accepting topics. We will set the agenda. We have six topics.

Today is our first video conference for this committee. If everybody has their microphone on mute, that would be wonderful, and staff could also have the video and the microphone off, and I see that's happening, which is wonderful. Also, if you have any cell phones, if you could turn them off, just as an added precaution. Try not to leave your seat, even though I had to do it this morning.

We can start with introductions. I can go with the list . . . Sorry about that. The system kicked me off and reassigned me in. I have no idea why, but that's what happened.

I'm just going to start with introductions. If we could start with Mr. Jessome.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

**THE CHAIR:** This is an agenda-setting meeting for us. Members should have received the topics; they were emailed yesterday. These topics will die on Friday, December 18<sup>th</sup>, when the House of Assembly is prorogued. As the Chair, I will instruct the Clerk, Ms. Kavanagh, to poll and get a unanimous consent that we can continue with those six topics.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

We can actually start with the topics. Anybody who would like to put forward any of the topics? We'll start with the Liberal Caucus. Mr. Horne.

BILL HORNE: I will put forward the topics. I could do all three at one time, if that's okay.

THE CHAIR: You may, Mr. Horne. Go ahead.

BILL HORNE: I move the following three topics and witnesses: the Society of Atlantic Heroes - Tim Brodie, president; Rally Point Retreat - Robert Grundy, president; and Veterans Memorial Park, Bass River, Nova Scotia - Ken Jamieson, chair of the Park Management Committee.

THE CHAIR: I actually have a note from the Clerk saying that the name for the Veterans Memorial Park is actually Cobequid Veterans Memorial Park. Is there an issue if we change the name? Okay.

Is there any discussion regarding the topics? Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: I have a question for the Liberal Caucus. Some of these topics seem to me that they might not require two hours of the committee's time. I certainly think sometimes - it's almost like we end up grilling our witnesses because they get questioned so thoroughly in this committee.

I would just encourage my colleagues to consider whether we might have a committee with two of these at once so that maybe that way we could deal with all four of the Liberal topics, but not feel too much of a grilling for the witnesses who are invited to appear before our committee. Just a suggestion.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion? My question is: how do we know how long does one start and end? Do we give them just one hour and start the other? I don't know how to solve that one. Mr. Maguire.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I think that we don't know how long. We're going to bring in somebody and we don't know how long or how short it's going to be. We may end up having in these witnesses and just like any other topic - if you look at the Opposition topics, it could be the same thing.

What I would encourage is to - we have one come in and we do the standard form, which is those witnesses come in and we have a meeting with those witnesses. That way

we don't feel rushed to get through things, and the witnesses get the full attention of the committee for the day.

THE CHAIR: Is there any other discussion? Are we in agreement with putting forward just the three topics as listed by Mr. Horne?

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

The motion is carried.

We'll move on now to the topics for the PC Party. Mr. Ryan.

MURRAY RYAN: I would like to put forward our three suggestions for presentations. First, Camp Hill Hospital, specifically surrounding challenges they face during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Hopefully for witnesses, we'd have representatives from the Camp Hill Veteran's Services and the Nova Scotia Health Authority.

The second organization would be Paws Fur Thought and the impacts COVID-19 has had on them from both a funding perspective and the challenges overall during the last nine months. The last organization will be the Last Post Fund - a witness would be Rear Admiral (Retired) Barry Keeler.

THE CHAIR: I believe we have two topics for the PC Party. Are you choosing two out of those three?

MURRAY RYAN: On my list I have three here, so my apologies. It would be the first two, the Camp Hill Hospital and Paws Fur Thought.

THE CHAIR: If I may ask, is it the specific person or anybody in that job, and it's up to the Clerk - if that person can't appear, they will choose somebody to send? Are we in agreement with that? Correct? For all of us, whether it's the Liberal topics or the PC topics, if we needed to make a decision whether it is the actual name that we're giving. In your topics there are no names, but anybody in that position can present, correct? We're in agreement with that? It allows Judy to get the right person for us. Am I correct, Judy?

I had that on my notes to ask to make sure that if they ask for a specific name, and that person isn't able or they decide that somebody else should come in to answer, that we allow Judy to send us a note to tell us who is coming. Do I have agreement? Yes? Wonderful.

Is there any discussion on the two topics for the PC Caucus? I see none. It's accepted. Thank you very much. We move on now to the NDP. Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: I'd like to put forward our first topic, which is Veterans' Physician Assistants' Role in the Health Care System. Across North America, there are physician assistants who are military veterans who are working in the health care system. We don't currently allow veterans with that experience and background to work in our system, in health care in Nova Scotia, and so we thought it would be interesting to explore that with representatives from the Canadian Association of Physician Assistants and the Nova Scotia College of Physicians and Surgeons.

THE CHAIR: Any discussion? Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: Just quickly - correct me if I'm wrong - do we have the individuals from the organizations? I know we were trying to enable some flexibility logistically for the clerk to make arrangements, but I'm just curious, do we have the possible front-runners for the presentation?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: No. We've named the two associations which we think are relevant to speak to the issue. Frankly, between the agenda-setting and the actual date of the committee hearing, there can be some shifting of roles, so we're not putting forward names, but we're glad to work with Ms. Kavanagh if she has any issues identifying the people at those organizations who are ready to speak to the issue. But we know that both organizations would be open to the invitation from the committee.

THE CHAIR: All in agreement, please say Aye or show a hand. Wonderful. Well, that was very fast. We did all the topics.

There were two outstanding topics from the previous agenda, and that is the Residents Council Committee for the Northumberland Veterans Unit, and the Sutherland Harris Memorial Hospital in Pictou, re: Capacity and Utilization of the Northumberland Veterans Unit. They haven't appeared because of COVID, and COVID is affecting them.

Also, the other topic that we haven't had was the Nova Scotia Branch of VETS Canada, re: Programs and Initiatives. Maybe we can ask Ms. Kavanagh just to let them know they can apply again, and we will put them on for the next agenda-setting. Is that okay with everyone? They haven't appeared. She tried to get them in many times, and they have not been prepared to appear because they're probably not meeting or they don't have much going on because of COVID. Am I correct, Ms. Kavanagh? I see a nod.

JUDY KAVANAGH: That's the sense I get from conversations with them, yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We will ask Ms. Kavanagh to reach out to them. Mr. Jessome.

[2:15 p.m.]

BEN JESSOME: Are they interested in showing up, Madam Chair?

THE CHAIR: I'm not sure if they've replied. Ms. Kavanagh.

JUDY KAVANAGH: One group has said that they are interested in coming at some point. When we were having in-person meetings, they were concerned about that. Another issue with that group is that because of the pandemic, they just haven't been active lately. They don't have much to report to us right now. The other group simply isn't returning my phone calls or emails.

THE CHAIR: Maybe we can let them reach out to us, if they're interested. Do we know whose topics they were?

JUDY KAVANAGH: They're quite old. One was from January 2019 - that was a Liberal topic.

THE CHAIR: The first one was Liberal?

JUDY KAVANAGH: That was the VETS Canada one.

THE CHAIR: Okay, that was Liberal.

JUDY KAVANAGH: The Residents Council Committee from the Northumberland Veterans Unit that was approved in November 2019 was a PC topic.

THE CHAIR: It's up to us, if it was our topic, to send them a request. Is it agreed to see if they're interested? We can add them for the next agenda-setting.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

We just need to pass a couple of motions regarding the virtual meeting. Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: I just ask for our attempt to do things a little more accessibly given the current climate, I move that we continue virtual meetings until further notice.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Chender.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I support the motion, but I just want to ask for clarification: what does “until further notice” mean? Does that mean at the discretion of the Chair? Does that mean we’d have another vote? Can you clarify that?

THE CHAIR: I believe it’s until we’re not in emergency measures and we are back meeting in person like other committees. Then we can vote to meet at that time as well.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: It’s by a vote of the committee to meet in person again?

THE CHAIR: Correct - am I correct? It all depends on how the situation . . . Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: This was under the impression that we were trying to accommodate these meetings virtually across the board. It wasn’t my intention to constrict us or anything like that - just to maintain that ability to meet virtually. I’m not trying to get us out of meeting in person when we have the opportunity to do that. Let’s keep things flexible and make it accommodating, particularly for outside members and our witnesses who may have some challenges meeting in person.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I totally support that - I’m just looking for clarity on the motion. When we return to meeting in person, it would be a vote of the committee? Is that your motion?

BEN JESSOME: I’m fine with that.

THE CHAIR: As the Chair, I say we can vote on it when the time comes. Thank you so much.

The next item that we have is the prorogation of the House. Does anybody have a motion to put forward? Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: Bear with me so I can get the appropriate language. This is consistent with what we may hear in the committees that we’ve established it through.

Madam Chair, I move that pursuant to Section 36 of the House of Assembly Act, and pursuant to Resolution 2, Section (a)(i), passed unanimously on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017, that this committee meet after the House has prorogued for the life of the General Assembly, abiding by Public Health protocols and continuing with virtual options as required.

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

The motion is carried.



The next one is an approval for the annual report. Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: I was going to give someone else the nod to do that if you wanted to spread it out, but I move that we accept the annual report as presented.

THE CHAIR: Any other business? Ms. Kavanagh.

JUDY KAVANAGH: I think the committee needs to vote on the annual report motion.

THE CHAIR: I'm so sorry. We need to vote. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Anybody else have any other business for the committee? I see none.

The next meeting is January 19<sup>th</sup> from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., and it will be via video conference and the witness to be determined, according to the list that we provided today.

Nothing else? I will adjourn this meeting, and thank you everybody for coming to this Zoom meeting. Thank you again. Have a wonderful afternoon and if I don't see you, Merry Christmas.

[The committee adjourned at 2:22 p.m.]