

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**Tuesday, November 16, 2021**

**Legislative Committees Office**

**Organizational/Agenda Setting**

**Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services**

## VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Chris Palmer (Chair)

Danielle Barkhouse (Vice-Chair)

Larry Harrison

Tom Taggart

Nolan Young

Hon. Ben Jessome

Ali Duale

Suzy Hansen

Lisa Lachance

In Attendance:

Heather Hoddinott  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel



House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2021**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**2:00 P.M.**

CHAIR

Chris Palmer

VICE-CHAIR

Danielle Barkhouse

THE CHAIR: I'd like to call the meeting to order. I'm honoured to be the Chair of this committee. We are all here to do a great job for our veterans in our province, and I look forward to the many discussions we're going to have around this table over the coming months and years and look forward to sharing as many ideas as we can to improve the lives of veterans from a provincial standpoint.

A few reminders before we start. I'd like to ask us all to keep our masks on during the meeting unless you're speaking. Please have your phones on silent or vibrate.

At this point, I'd like to ask everybody to introduce themselves. The members first.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Our first meeting today is an agenda-setting meeting that we will be having, an organizational meeting to discuss our agenda going forward. We'll do a brief review of the committee procedures. That will be provided in a number of committee decisions will need to be made today.

We'll go through a few topics from an organizational and agenda-setting measure. We'll talk first about meeting schedules. Currently the committee meets monthly on the third Tuesday of the month. The usual meeting time is 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Is there any discussion regarding meeting times going forward?

TOM TAGGART: Do we need a motion on that?

THE CHAIR: My understanding is we don't.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: One question: When the House is sitting, we'll just have to move it - we don't have the meeting? Perfect.

THE CHAIR: The current schedule will remain the third Tuesday of each month. As far as the agenda-setting that we need to discuss, topics submitted must be approved by the committee through a motion. Previously approved topics included three from the government caucus, two from the Official Opposition, and one from the Third Party. Because they can all submit as many as they want, it's the number of approved that matters here. Is there any discussion? MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: I have a motion prepared. I forward it to the clerk, right? The motion is: I move that the government caucus will get three regular or emergency topics per six-meeting rotation. The Official Opposition will get two regular or emergency topics per six-meeting rotation, and the Third Party will get one regular or emergency topic per six-meeting rotation.

The standing committee will rotate through topics using the following order: government, Official Opposition, government, Third Party, government, Official Opposition.

Once the list of six topics is exhausted, the Chair of this committee will hold another agenda-setting meeting that will follow the above rotation.

THE CHAIR: We have a motion on the floor. Mr. Jessome.

HON. BEN JESSOME: Mr. Chair, just for consideration, maybe there can be some language added to enable the Chair and staff to adapt that while we're keeping the same number and the same breakdown. There is value in the Chair having the flexibility to work with staff to bring in witnesses at their discretion rather than having to come back to the committee all the time to make those housekeeping-type initiatives. We keep the same number, but with the consent of the committee, to just add some flexibility for the Chair to work with staff - like if we have to adapt the witness based on availability or things like weather so that we don't have to come back to this table every time to do things that we can probably leave up to the Chair and staff to look after.

TOM TAGGART: I absolutely agree with that. My motion really speaks to topics and not to presenters. I think certainly whatever topic we deal with, we should have the best possible advice or people to advise us on that. I'm certainly supportive of that.

Does it need to be in this motion? Should it be a separate motion, I guess, is my question. I don't know, but I'm happy with it.

THE CHAIR: It's an amendment to the motion, technically, correct? Any other discussion?

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The next topic we'll have a conversation about is the witness questioning. The structure of how witnesses will be questioned by the committee members shall be agreed upon by the committee. The committee could keep a running list of questioners and go member by member or there will be two rounds of questioning. The first round is 20 minutes. The second round is typically 10 to 14 minutes, depending on the amount of time remaining and allowing for time to deal with committee business. The order of questioning in that aspect is Official Opposition, Third Party and governing Party.

Is there any discussion on that? Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: We're just trying to distinguish what the format of questioning is going to be? I hear three options on the table.

THE CHAIR: Two.

BEN JESSOME: Can you repeat that then, please, Mr. Chair?

THE CHAIR: The committee could keep a running list of questioners and go member by member or there will be two rounds of questioning. The first round is 20 minutes. The second round is typically 10 to 14 minutes, depending on the amount of time remaining and allowing for time to deal with committee business. The order of questioning would be, in that case, the Official Opposition, third party, and governing party.

BEN JESSOME: I've sat on this committee since 2013 and operationally, I think it works well when we can ask questions as they come up. You'll see over the time that you're here with the different committees that you sit on, that different committees do function differently. In particular, Veterans Affairs seems to work well when each member has an opportunity equally to jump into the queue and ask questions.

If the committee decides that we want to shift gears at another time, then we can do that, but my two cents is that we go around the table and put our hands up and ask questions as they come.

THE CHAIR: Any discussion on that? MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: I just want to say I'm fine with that suggestion. It's something that works well, so let's continue that. As mentioned, you always have the opportunity to amend this by the committee. If something doesn't seem to be working, we have that opportunity to amend in the future, but it's fine.

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: I certainly agree with that. This is my first meeting and I'm assuming - and I hope that I'm correct - as we go around through the question process, each person would have an opportunity to ask the one question before someone else got a second one.

THE CHAIR: I think that would be a courtesy. As the Chair, I would recognize as you put your hands up or I'd recognize each speaker and go from there.

No other discussion? Great. If every day in the House was like this, this would be great. (Laughter)

Next topic is motions. If members are intending to introduce a motion at a meeting, please email it to the clerk. When the motion is put forward at the meeting, the clerk will distribute it via email to members. This reduces paper, it's quick and efficient. We won't do it for every single motion, just for the longer ones. Members might want to read carefully or discuss before they vote on it.

MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: Just with regard to that, I don't know how everyone else feels, but personally I like to have the motion in front of me that I can dissect and write on a piece of paper. I don't think we're going to be getting that many motions that are going to be coming through here, where it's going to be rampant paper-paper-paper - if that's the case, maybe I'll change my tune. For the time being, I would like to have a motion in front of me on a piece of paper as opposed to logging in my email, checking my device, waiting for something to come through. I don't know how anybody else feels about that.

THE CHAIR: MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I feel the same way as MLA Young. I also like to have the opportunity to go over the information so that way there's no rash decisions made at this committee.

THE CHAIR: MLA Hansen.

SUZY HANSEN: I agree, but I would also like to, if I may ask to have it emailed ahead of time, maybe the night before, and then that way when we do have a piece of paper in front of us, our thoughts are already ready to add to or not. I'm for either way.

THE CHAIR: MLA Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: I promise I'm not going to try to be catty here, but as a former Chair of various committees, the number of times that we would have asked for this protocol to take place and I'll say the level of operationalizing that ask that took place was not exactly to the same situation that was proposed by the Chair and perhaps the government of the day.

I'm fine to try to do that as a general rule. I think respectfully it makes sense for us all to have the opportunity to look something over. It does enable an opportunity for us all to consider what may or may not take place as a result of that motion.

I would humbly suggest that there should be opportunities for us to make motions on the fly based on the discussion of the day. There are a number of reactions that can take place to that, whether it be tabling the motion or whatnot, but I do think that we should leave that door open as a means of flexibility.

THE CHAIR: MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I think we are with this motion, because it states right in it that it's for the longer ones, so anything that's a page or two, there might be quick two-line motions. You don't know, right? It states right in it that it's for longer ones, so I think that should be sufficient in this.

THE CHAIR: Further to the conversation that we're having, just to note, if members are reading from a document that has not already been provided to the committee, it should be emailed to the clerk as well, who will distribute it to members during the meeting via email.

Any points on that? MLA Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: I'm fine as long as at the end of the day we have some flexibility to make motions on the fly. I think that's fair and has been the precedent that's been set, at least over my time around. I think we'll all experience this committee as a very well-

intended initiative. There have been very few instances where the emotions have been adversarial or controversial, rather than constructive.

[2:15 p.m.]

I think that it is important for us to enable that flexibility to enable something on the fly, regardless of the length. We'll try to be practical with the time required to digest motions and things like that. We can ask for recesses and whatnot to understand what's going on or clarification questions. There's more than ample opportunity for the committee to consider and have discussion, but I just want to make sure that we do have an opportunity to make motions on the fly if they do come up.

THE CHAIR: With no further discussion on that piece, we'll just move on here then. The next item that comes up here would be the December meeting. We previously discussed that our meetings would be the third Tuesday of each month. Where the third Tuesday in December is the 21<sup>st</sup>, there might have been a thought that it might be hard to coordinate witnesses and get things in order for the 21<sup>st</sup> of December, that we look at our next meeting being in January.

Any discussion on that? How do you feel about that?

BEN JESSOME: Just to clarify, our meeting would be in January?

THE CHAIR: That's correct.

BEN JESSOME: I'm open to trying to schedule something earlier in the month if that's agreeable with the committee. I recognize that December is a busy month, but this is a committee that doesn't meet when the House is in session. If we want to ensure that we're maximizing our opportunities for witness engagement and questioning of this nature, then I think we should consider trying to make use of that December month as well.

THE CHAIR: Is the idea that we would meet on the 21<sup>st</sup> and do what we can do for that December 21<sup>st</sup> meeting or move the meeting? What's the thought being put forward? Mr. Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: I don't want to jump in on Mr. Jessome, but can we leave it? I need to understand. I don't understand the process. The clerk knows what other meetings are scheduled between now and, say, December 21<sup>st</sup>. I don't know what the notice is we have to give, but if we could kind of agree to leave it with the clerk and the Chair to try to find a date that would get us in here and get us started down the road, because I absolutely agree. Is that okay? Is that reasonable?

THE CHAIR: I'll take the direction from the committee. Ms. Hansen.



SUZY HANSEN: I definitely agree as well. Even if we could bump it up to maybe the week before, just to kind of give us an opportunity to get started. I agree. We don't want to miss out on a month and just be able to kind of keep it moving - absolutely.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Duale.

ALI DUALE: I'll do my best to be generous to those coming from out of the city. For me, I'm just living in the backyard here, I can show up any day. I also have to be mindful of those who are driving far away. I think that also has to be put into context. Whoever is making the schedule, be mindful of those people.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: I was just going to say that Tuesday works quite well for me and I think most of us caucus on Wednesdays anyway, so if we're here Tuesday, then we just stay over, except for those who are halfway.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I like the idea of leaving it up to the clerk because, for example, the Health Committee is on Tuesdays as well, 1:00 to 3:00. Some committees meet on Tuesdays - I don't know how many, but I'm certain a percentage - and so I would be more than happy to leave it up to the ones who know everybody's schedules instead of dropping here and there.

THE CHAIR: So, is the direction of the committee that the clerk and myself would come up with an alternate date in December? It would only be for the month of December, but then January we'd be back on our third Tuesday of the month. Is that the direction of the committee? MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: Just to further complicate things - I apologize (Laughter). If it's the third Tuesday, or whatever it works out to be - if it happens to be the same date - I agree this is important and we should maximize our time here, so whatever works at the discretion of the Chair and the clerk, let's try to maximize our time, whatever the day may be.

THE CHAIR: All right. Under advisement. We may end up leaving the same date. We'll leave that with you.

HEATHER HODDINOTT: Okay. I can follow up with you on that.

THE CHAIR: Okay. MLA Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: There is perhaps value in having a regularly scheduled program month over month but I would submit that December we add an element to flexibility to

make sure that given that the 21<sup>st</sup> is the third Tuesday that we have an opportunity to get it in specifically for the month of December. That's my two cents.

THE CHAIR: MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: And my two cents, I don't know - you'll have to excuse my ignorance. I'm a bit of a neophyte as well in this. The option for Zoom - because you're absolutely correct, travel can be quite difficult, and I'm wondering if that option can be made possible for this meeting.

THE CHAIR: I would think we'd have to obviously talk to the technical people to organize all that but I'm sure it's a possibility. I'll leave that to (Interruptions) Yes, MLA Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: Just for curiosity's sake, maybe staff can advise, but is that something that we need to consult the Speaker's Office on? I can't remember, to be honest.

HEATHER HODDINOTT: We may need to consult with the Speaker's Office, and that's a thing I can take . . .

THE CHAIR: For a change to Zoom.

HEATHER HODDINOTT: Right. In place, yes. (Interruptions)

THE CHAIR: We'll check on that with the Speaker's Office and then we will proceed from there. All right.

So for that meeting, we would need to look at our topics for the agenda for that meeting. Does everyone have the - MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: Mr. Chair, that's a question that's been jumping around in my mind since we first sat down and I made that motion. We passed a motion that says three, two and one, basically, and we've got eight here. I thought that one of the purposes of this meeting was to set that agenda for the first six months. I don't know where to go from this but I'm suggesting that the PCs have three and three are noted, but the Liberal Party has three and only permitted two in the first six months, and the NDP has one.

I would suggest that would be the particular Party's decision on which ones they wanted to bring forward, not us as the committee. Is that fair ball?

THE CHAIR: I agree with that.

TOM TAGGART: My follow-up question, if I could, is when does that happen? Does that happen today?

THE CHAIR: At the meeting yes.

TOM TAGGART: All right. I'm only asking this because I want to understand it, because I have to chair a meeting (Laughter). We set six dates, we follow those dates unless there's some type of emergency or whatever. Is that correct?

HEATHER HODDINOTT: That is correct.

TOM TAGGART: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: At this moment, what I'd like to do is ask the government representatives to put forward the three topics. I'm assuming the three topics that are listed will be the three topics that the government side will go with.

MLA Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: There may be value, at the discretion of the Chair, for the committee to consider each of these in separate motions. In the past, there has been some value in doing things one by one. In this case, three different topics. If there are questions around presenters and things like that, there is some value in doing things in separate motions, but I'll leave that to the consideration of the Chair and committee.

THE CHAIR: If the committee agrees, we can do that. We can go back to the original (Interruptions). MLA Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: In the event that there are three different topics and witnesses submitted at one time, and the chance that motions are defeated, then it still enables us to - as opposed to dismissing the three or the two - it wouldn't be one, but the two at the same time or the three at the same time. It gives us an ability to pick and choose, rather than defeating a motion that has all the subjects in one motion. Does that make sense?

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: The way I envisioned this is that we would have a motion - there's no debate on the three PC ones, right? I guess one question would be, if I don't vote, is that a nay?

I don't believe I have any business whatsoever in determining which - maybe I'm wet behind the ears, you know what I mean? I'm not sure I have any business deciding what topics either the Official Opposition or Third Party bring forward. I may be wrong, but I think that's the decision that those caucuses make. I'm not going to vote on them, or I don't plan on it. My question is, if I do not vote, does that mean it's a nay, or can I just abstain?

THE CHAIR: It would be abstained.

TOM TAGGART: It's not a nay vote?

THE CHAIR: It's not a nay vote.

TOM TAGGART: Thank you. That's all the matters to me.

THE CHAIR: MLA Hansen.

[2:30 p.m.]

SUZY HANSEN: I'm like MLA Taggart here. Just a point of clarification. I just want to be sure. What we're discussing right now is topics for the next six months. We already know three are for the government side, two are for Official Opposition, one is for us.

We're just discussing that amongst our own caucus to decide. I just want to clarify, because I want to be sure too. When the time comes for us to put forward that topic, that's when we'll be deciding whether or not we want to put that one forward.

THE CHAIR: And for some reason, I think the idea is if the topic - let's say you have two topics and you have the opportunity to put one forward: That's only the first round. You still have that opportunity to place your second witness at some point in the future too.

I think the thought would be there are two options. There's one that MLA Jessome said that would be to vote on every single one, or basically just allow each caucus to select the one that they want to go with - three from the government, two from the Official Opposition, and one from the NDP. I think there's a general agreement that we'll do the original thought of each caucus will select the topic and the witness that they want to bring forward in the first round. Mr. Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: How far in advance does our caucus have to notify the clerk of what the topic will be?

THE CHAIR: I guess the thought might be that it may be difficult for each caucus to decide that immediately at this meeting. They might want time to do that or can the decision be made today? Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: Just to clarify - are you talking about submitting topics for consideration?

THE CHAIR: Yes, that's what we're talking about.

BEN JESSOME: It's one week, if I'm not mistaken. The intention is one week. Generally, that is the procedure.

HEATHER HODDINOTT: The process normally will be that the committee clerk will email the Party members and the Party researchers and indicate when the time is ready for submissions. The deadline will also be provided as well. It generally is a week. You will get an email indicating that.

THE CHAIR: There is no further need for discussion on that particular issue right now. We've got an understanding of how the process is going to work. Does the committee agree with that? Excellent. Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: I'll be the first one to take the plunge here. I move that the Liberal caucus's topics for the consideration of the committee be read as topics two and three on your list.

First, Transition from Active Service and Veteran Homelessness Prevention. We bring in as our witnesses representatives from the Department of Community Services, at their discretion; HRM Division Chief Emergency Management, Erika Fleck, the Assistant Chief of Emergency Management; representative Debbie Lowther from VETS Canada - she's the Chair and CEO and co-founder; and a representative from the Royal Canadian Legion Nova Scotia Nunavut Command and representatives Kenneth George or Stephen Telford who are service officers.

The second one - the third as it reads on your list - we'll receive presentation from a national organization called Seamless Canada, which is a composition of Canadian Forces, Department of National Defence and a representative from their organization at their discretion. If anybody wants clarification on that, I'm happy to provide that.

THE CHAIR: MLA Jessome, that's a motion you're putting forward, that those would be the two topics and the witnesses?

BEN JESSOME: If I may, do I have to amend the initial motion? I think I do.

THE CHAIR: I think you should.

BEN JESSOME: So amend that motion to include in the first topic Mr. Gus Cameron, who's joining us today as a witness, at that meeting pertaining to mental health and crisis - excuse me, Transition from Active Service to Veteran and Homelessness Prevention. So amended.

THE CHAIR: Okay. There's a motion on the floor to accept those two topics and witnesses from the Liberal side. MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: I apologize to MLA Jessome - I was talking and not listening. So you changed to go with the mental health and crisis support as opposed to . . .

THE CHAIR: No, sorry, the bottom two.

TOM TAGGART: You're going with the bottom two? Okay. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Any more discussion on that? MLA Duale.

ALI DUALE: I just want to mention that amendment that this would make - Gus Cameron is right here and he will provide you his title and what organization he serves, so hopefully you'll get that information. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Mr. Cameron, thank you for being here and thank you for your service.

We'd like to ask the NDP to put forward their topic. MLA Lachance.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Chair, we would put forward the topic Women and Gender-Diverse Veterans Issues. We're suggesting Dr. Maya Eichler, who is noted in your handout. That's our motion.

THE CHAIR: Any discussion?

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

MLA Barkhouse, could I ask you to put forward your topics?

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Definitely.

THE CHAIR: Sorry. MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: I was wondering if we would call for a recess. Would that consist of a time when I could do that?

THE CHAIR: We will recess.

TOM TAGGART: Thanks.

[2:38 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[2:46 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: I'll bring the meeting back to order. Before we recessed, MLA Barkhouse was going to notify the committee of the proposed witnesses and topics from the government side.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: We are going to do Services Provided by the Foundation, and that's Veterans Legal Assistance Foundation's Peter Stoffer, VLAFF Board Member.

The second one we're bringing to the table is an Update on Current Affairs, Funds, and Services, and that's Royal Canadian Legion - Nova Scotia/Nunavut Branch. Valerie Mitchell-Veinotte is the Director.

The third and final, which is Legal Capital Assistance Program, Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, and that's Nancy Sheppard, Corporate Strategist.

THE CHAIR: All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Thank you for getting through that part. Now we know who we will be seeing and who we'll be talking to.

We'll move on to correspondence. An email had been submitted from a Brad LeBlanc, President of the Veterans UN-NATO Canada-Nova Scotia. It was submitted to the clerk, and it was a request to attend the committee meeting today under a misunderstanding resulting from the sharing of the proposed agenda topics.

Committee best practices was reviewed between the clerk and counsel, so this is a reminder that all committee documents are considered confidential and should not be shared outside of caucuses and the LCO. This is the common best practice observed by each committee.

That was just something that I was asked to read today. At least we have an understanding of that in our committee.

After that, the next item on my agenda here is adjournment. Is there any further business before we do that?

MLA Harrison.

LARRY HARRISON: I just think we should probably pick the topic for next month, and that will give people a chance to get organized. I think we agreed on the Legal Capital Assistance Program.

THE CHAIR: I'm not sure if you heard that. We're just giving the clerk flexibility to ...

MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: Will we be advised of what that topic is, so that we can do our due diligence in preparation?

THE CHAIR: The Clerk.

HEATHER HODDINOTT: I can send the agenda. The materials, the notice of meeting get sent out a week before each scheduled meeting so you'll have at least a week's notice to know which topic we'll be addressing, which witness will be attending.

THE CHAIR: Any other further business? Any other further questions? Thank you for your patience. It was my first time in the chair today. I appreciate that.

The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 2:51 p.m.]