

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**Tuesday, January 16, 2024**

**COMMITTEE ROOM**

**True Patriot Love: Veteran Virtual Hub/Veteran Volunteerism**

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## **VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

Chris Palmer (Chair)  
Danielle Barkhouse (Vice Chair)  
Larry Harrison  
Tom Taggart  
Hon. Steve Craig  
Hon. Ben Jessome  
Hon. Tony Ince  
Gary Burrill  
Kendra Coombes

### **In Attendance:**

Tamer Nusseibeh  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Philip Grassie  
Legislative Counsel

## **WITNESSES**

True Patriot Love Foundation  
Eleanor Taylor, Manager, Community Engagement and Advocacy



**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, JANUARY 16, 2024**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**2:00 P.M.**

CHAIR  
Chris Palmer

Vice Chair  
Danielle Barkhouse

THE CHAIR: Order. I call this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. I'm Chris Palmer, MLA for Kings West, and the Chair of this committee. Today, we'll hear from a presenter regarding True Patriot Love: Veterans Virtual Hub and Veteran Volunteerism.

At this point, I'd like to ask everybody in the committee room to please put your phones on silent. In the case of an emergency, we'll use the Granville Street entrance and walk up to the Grand Parade.

At this moment, I'd like to ask all our committee members to introduce themselves, your name and your constituency, beginning with our Vice Chair, MLA Barkhouse.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Thank you, everyone. I'd also like to note the presence of Legislative Counsel Philip Grassie to my left - welcome, Philip - and our Legislative Committee Clerk Tamer Nusseibeh.

As I mentioned earlier, our topic is True Patriot Love: Veteran Virtual Hub and Veteran Volunteerism. We'd like to welcome Ms. Taylor to our committee this afternoon - nice to see you again. We met at a Respect Forum meeting a few years ago. It's nice to see you and hear what your organization is doing today. I'd like to offer the floor to you to introduce yourself and offer any opening remarks you'd like to give today.

ELEANOR TAYLOR: Very nice to be here. It is a pleasure to be in the presence of people invested in this important work, so thank you for the opportunity.

True Patriot Love is Canada's foundation for the military and veteran community. We work as a close, trusted partner with the Canadian Armed Forces, Veterans Affairs Canada, and the federal and provincial governments. Before I speak specifically of the work of True Patriot Love, let me share a little bit about my journey as a veteran.

I was born and raised in Antigonish, and when I turned 18, I joined the Canadian Armed Forces as an infantry officer. I served in the Canadian Armed Forces for 27 years - 25 in the regular force and 2 in the reserve force here in Halifax at the end of my career.

My time in the military was incredibly valuable, and it provided me with leadership and operational experiences that really transformed me. However, service also made me acutely aware of the toll that service life takes on members and their families. Like many Atlantic Canadians who are in the Canadian Armed Forces, I chose to retire at home, mostly because the values of Nova Scotia are aligned with my values, and I wanted to raise my children here.

In 2022, I was thrilled to become part of True Patriot Love Foundation's team, working from here in Halifax leading advocacy and outreach. As the national foundation, True Patriot Love works across a range of issues facing our military members and veterans. We support military families and children, especially as they navigate issues of multiple deployments and locations away from their home supports.

We fund a range of programs to assist the health and well-being of serving members, veterans, and their families, including mental health, homelessness, employment, and transition. For those who are injured or become ill, we contribute to their recovery and rehabilitation through sport, adventure, and the arts. We help transition back into local communities post-uniform, especially with programs focused on volunteerism - which we'll talk about today - and service opportunities to maintain a sense of purpose, which we believe is central to a good transition.

Since 2009, True Patriot Love has disbursed more than \$41 million in funds across Canada to over 1,000 community partners, and supported over 40,000 beneficiaries. In Nova Scotia, over \$1.5 million has been disbursed to organizations such as MFRCs - Military Family Resource Centres - VETS Canada, Strongest Families Institute, Mood Disorders Canada, Outward Bound Canada for Veterans, and Petites Lanternes. We have

several funding mechanisms that are noteworthy. I have enumerated them in my remarks. I won't review them here, but I'm very happy to take questions on them.

Today's agenda includes a description of two initiatives: our Veteran Virtual Hub and the Veteran Volunteerism Initiative. I will provide an overview of both and introduce a third initiative that may interest the committee.

First, the Veteran Hub. This is a True Patriot Love initiative that was launched this September. It's a national online platform that helps connect veterans, serving members, and their families with resources in their area. Those resources include services, opportunities, and volunteering opportunities in their local communities. It allows the veteran and military community to come to an interactive map, zoom into that map to their local community, and see what resources and events are available for them.

Our Veteran Hub, having only been launched in September, now represents over 300 service providers across Canada of volunteer opportunities and events. We have had over 1,000 new users, and there have been over 4,000 views in the last 90 days. We are excited to see it grow.

One of the challenges that faces veterans is trying to gain an understanding of resources that are available to them, and we feel that this hub helps meet that gap. But it will only work if we can communicate it, get services to register on it, and get veterans to make sure that they see it and use it. The more people who know about it, the better it will become, and the more it will serve our community. We would be delighted if you would promote it among your networks, and use it as a living directory of those resources that are available. That's the Veteran Hub.

Another point of collaboration is our Veteran Volunteerism Initiative. Following military-to-civilian transition, veterans sometimes feel disconnected from their former communities and separated from a previously well-defined sense of purpose. That's because they've moved around so much, and they haven't had the opportunity to put down the roots that many of the rest of us have. Volunteering harnesses the veteran propensity to serve, and addresses the loss of purpose and connection. Through funding from the 2023 Veterans Affairs Family and Well-Being Fund, we will research and develop a national action plan on veteran volunteerism. We will work with six program partners across Canada, and leverage veteran volunteers across Canada to develop evidence that currently does not exist that shows the connection between veteran volunteerism and well-being.

Two of our potential program partners are organizations that have testified at this committee: Jessica Miller from the Veteran Farm Project and Dave Gallson from the Mood Disorders Society of Canada are both likely recipients or program partners in this initiative.

When this research is complete, we intend to develop a national action plan that will offer tools and communication strategies to provinces and municipalities to help them

find, recruit, screen, and employ veteran volunteers. We think that there's enormous symbiotic benefit for both communities - that is, civil communities and the veteran community - if we can harness this.

We would be delighted to receive a recommendation for a Nova Scotian representative on our Veteran Volunteerism advisory committee that will oversee this three-year initiative.

Finally, a project we are working on in Ontario that may be of interest to you is the Building a Veteran Friendly Ontario Initiative. In partnership with Challenge Factory, Treble Victor Group, and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, and in collaboration with the Canadian Armed Forces Transition Group, Military Family Services, Chief of Reserves, and Veterans Affairs Canada, we have a systems-focused approach that will provide a greater understanding of the obstacles to a successful transition and how they can be mitigated. We are building tools to support employers and veterans in meeting their objectives. We intend to export the learnings from this project to other parts of Canada to improve veteran transition and employment nationally.

Central to our efforts is understanding that any employment strategy needs to be looked at through the dual lens of both the needs of employers and the needs of veterans. Based on preliminary discussions, we believe that a version of this initiative in Nova Scotia would enable efforts to support veteran transition and workforce development. We would welcome an opportunity to learn more about the Government of Nova Scotia's own priorities to see if such an initiative would bring value here.

In closing, thank you for the attention that you have given this important issue. We are grateful for the opportunity to speak, and look forward to our continued elaboration.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms. Taylor. We will begin our question and answer period now. The protocol of our committee is each caucus gets 20 minutes to ask you questions, and then at the end of that 20 minutes, if we have extra time, we can split that up into shorter amounts for each caucus as well. We will begin our questioning now, and we will probably close our questioning at 3:40 p.m. We will begin with the Liberal caucus. Who will be taking the lead? We'll go to MLA Jessome.

HON. BEN JESSOME: I appreciate the opportunity to ask a few questions today. You identified one, two, and three areas of consideration for the committee today. Can you expand a little bit upon the second one, having to do with the partnership to enhance the evidence or the data that's out there... (Interruption) Yes, exactly, please.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Taylor, I should have mentioned to you before we began, but I'll just get you to wait until I recognize you, then the red light will come on. Ms. Taylor.

ELEANOR TAYLOR: The Veteran Volunteerism Initiative is rooted, as I said, in the premise that veterans, when they leave service, are disconnected from that purpose that really drove them through their service. They also haven't had the opportunity to develop the community connections that those in the civil community have had their whole lives to put down. The other reality for many veterans, if they are reasonably well, is they don't want to be perceived as recipients of charity, although they may need a bit of support. Sometimes it can be challenging for them because they don't want to go with their hand out requesting help, but they would benefit from being better connected with the community.

We have all seen the research on how communities across Canada need volunteers, and the relationship that exists between well-being broadly and volunteerism. There is research in other parts of the world on the connection between veteran volunteerism and well-being, but we have none here in Canada. We want to build that body of evidence and make it explicitly clear that we can enhance well-being and strengthen communities by investing in veteran volunteerism.

The plan is a three-year plan. In our first year, we are establishing an advisory committee, finding program partners from across Canada who leverage veteran volunteers, and we are going to develop an evaluation framework rooted in the Veterans Affairs Canada evaluation metrics. We will then take a year and evaluate six program partners through different lenses. We want to look at the impact of veterans volunteering alone in support of the civil community and veterans volunteering alone in support of the military community.

Then we want to see if there's a difference between veterans volunteering in groups in support of the civil community - so just think about a Team Rubicon Canada and emergency responsiveness, and veterans volunteering in groups in support of the civil community. We also want to take a look at the impact of virtual volunteering, and we will take a year to evaluate the volunteers through that lens.

At the end of that year, we intend to do a collaborative working group to develop an action plan, which we hope will be nested in Volunteer Canada's broader strategy on volunteerism across Canada. We hope to develop tools that would benefit communities so that they know how to contact veterans. How do you find veterans? How do you know that the job you're giving to the veteran is going to serve them and serve the community - so how to find them, how to recruit them, how to screen them, and how to reinforce those relationships. We really believe that this has the potential to not only enhance veteran well-being, which of course is central, but also to strengthen Canada, which veterans and serving members also deeply care about.

BEN JESSOME: For the record, I got to see very prevalently the impact that volunteerism had on a community that was destroyed in a wildfire this Summer, alongside folks at Team Rubicon. I got to participate and interact with folks, and actually get into

some of the destroyed homes alongside some of these volunteers. It was obvious just how present they were, and how interested in serving the community they were. We had folks from all across the country, of course. We had partnership with Taskforce Kiwi and from a little farther away.

[2:15 p.m.]

It was a great example of how important those fundamentals are around serving others, and being able to put them to use in such a constructive and valuable way can make a big difference - not only for the people who are working in those positions but certainly for the community members, and specifically the one I represent.

It's interesting to hear that there really isn't any evidence or information that exists out there in Canada related to collecting this type of data and having it available to inform policy, even just to reassure members that this is the evidence - that this can lend itself to a better state of mind, a more fulfilled retirement, or whatever the case is for people who might be not quite ready to make that move yet. Oftentimes, if they know and have a friend - somebody working in a similar volunteer capacity - it makes it a little easier for people whose connection with their friends and former servicemembers might not be there as much - so having people to reassure them that there's a benefit there for them.

You referenced establishing a list of partners throughout the nation, I guess. Do you plan to do it more broadly on a national scope, or is it something that you can lean on - like this committee, for example - to help identify different organizations? I sat on the committee for 10 years. There are a number of organizations that we see come through here. Is that list of the organizations beneficial to you in terms of creating that initial ask database?

ELEANOR TAYLOR: Yes. Our program partners for this project have not quite been selected, but we are very much down to a final selection. Here in Nova Scotia, we hope to partner with the Veteran Farm Project. That is the partner that we would like to partner with here in Nova Scotia.

We are trying to represent Canada broadly to get a real understanding of the challenges regionally, and also so that we can push the data through those organizations into the various provinces. However, we would be very interested in a list of organizations in Nova Scotia that are leveraging veteran volunteers as we do this work, so that we have a better understanding of who might be interested in this. Also, I would be very interested in encouraging them to register on the Veteran Hub, because the Veteran Hub will also highlight volunteer opportunities, and if they are leveraging veteran volunteers, and we can encourage to go there, they will see those opportunities regionally and municipally.

THE CHAIR: MLA Ince.



HON. TONY INCE: My question will be: How do you encourage veterans in becoming engaged in volunteering in your organization, and what sort of supports are there for them?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Taylor.

ELEANOR TAYLOR: There's work to be done here to develop a national communication plan to encourage veteran volunteerism, both amongst the veterans and also amongst communities across Canada. I think the reason that we don't have a lot of data is because often people just intuitively think that of course it makes sense that volunteerism would help somebody connect with their community. But we believe volunteerism not only helps connect with community, but through those relationships also can help with future employment, and can also help with connecting to other services that might be in the community.

To speak directly to your point about how you encourage people to engage in volunteerism, the best that I have found is remaining connected on social media and pushing through social media, using avenues that exist through the Respect Forum - where we met - through Veterans Facebook pages, which is where veterans tend to congregate, and also events that are happening throughout the community, like Legions.

I will say that one of the things I personally did before I joined the foundation, and after I left the Canadian Armed Forces, is that I was part of a group of veterans and serving members who were working very hard to get Afghans out of Afghanistan after it fell. I witnessed this enormous groundswell of people who were deeply passionate, and were bringing all their tools to the table to try to solve a substantial problem, and made enormous progress. You see in examples like the Veteran Farm Project and Team Rubicon Canada, that veterans, when they have the opportunity to serve their community, they thrive. They really thrive.

I think we can get better at this. I think we can get better at advocating for this and encouraging this. That's what we hope to build - a toolbox to help open those communication streams and develop those supports.

TONY INCE: Can you touch on how you folks are funded and what federal, provincial, and third-party donations you receive?

ELEANOR TAYLOR: We receive funding from Veterans Affairs Canada. We have received funding from the provincial Government of Ontario. We receive private donations, and we have relationships with foundations across Canada through fundraising. I am not a fundraiser, and I am not deeply involved in the details of that, but if you have a specific question about that, I could certainly get it for you.

THE CHAIR: MLA Jessome, with about six and a half minutes.

HON. BEN JESSOME: You referenced existing partnerships with organizations like the MFRC, VETS Canada, Strongest Families, et cetera. What types of interactions do you have with them? You referenced the appetite to bring people into that hub as an objective. What other types of interactions do you have alongside those other organizations?

ELEANOR TAYLOR: We work with our partners in a number of ways. Sometimes the relationship is very interactive. For example, in the employment and transition work that we're doing in Ontario, we are working regularly with the Canadian Armed Forces Transition Group to help understand the needs that serving members have as they leave service. We are also working with a not-for-profit called Treble Victor Group, which is a group of volunteers who support second career transition - veterans helping other veterans figure out their next employment bound.

We're working with Military Family Services so we can understand the needs of spouses in employment. We are working with the Chief of Reserves so that we consider reserve employment through that work. That is a very collaborative project. We meet together. We've had in-person meetings to talk about the issues. We are getting feedback from them on all of the products that we develop. That's an example of an interactive project.

There is, indeed, of course, in some cases simply a supportive funding relationship where an application is made, and we do a review of an organization's ability to manage the funds and steward the funds. In many cases, we seek to support capacity growth of that organization, help them grow their not-for-profit or charity so that they better serve the community. In some cases, they're very mature, and that relationship is a supportive one but largely a financial relationship.

We are deeply interested in all our program partners, and we have a robust relationship with them. We have a person on staff whose job it is to remain in contact with those individuals and make sure those funds are stewarded as they were intended.

THE CHAIR: MLA Ince.

HON. TONY INCE: Can you describe or talk about the connection of service members and veterans, and the impact that has on both?

ELEANOR TAYLOR: Yes. As a serving member, I will be completely honest, I didn't appreciate the value that veterans brought in our communities. It wasn't until I transitioned and found myself separated from the community that had supported me, and that I cared deeply about, that I found myself feeling like I needed connection back into that I had grown up with and had shaped me. I think there is a really important relationship that is well established between the veterans and the military - those who have served. We

see it cultivated in volunteer organizations. We see it cultivated in the Royal Canadian Legion.

[2:30 p.m.]

I will say that most veterans I know - not all veterans I know - want to remain abreast of what our Canadian Armed Forces are doing, want to understand changes, both to policy and what's happening operationally. The service doesn't end when you take off the uniform. Your connection to that organization endures, and also, your connection to the people who served in it in some ways becomes more important.

THE CHAIR: MLA Jessome.

HON. BEN JESSOME: I guess I'm hearing another example of how - with respect to the interest and following along with someone's employment after service - trying to track people and how they're doing after they retire, it has been expressed to me, that it is difficult to keep track of people once they have either moved to another province or moved on from the Armed Forces, period.

Unless someone's volunteering the information somehow, it can be difficult to track where people are going, and identify how often or how you can help people who are in need. Particularly because once they leave the service, they may not be accessible unless they present themselves, or register, or have an opportunity to identify themselves as a former military member or an active military member.

THE CHAIR: Order. The time for the Liberal questioning has come to an end. I meant to mention, too, if I do cut in, it's just that we stick to our 20-minute time frame.

I will pass it on to the NDP caucus. MLA Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: Thank you, but I'd be happy for my colleague to complete his line of reasoning, give you a chance to reflect on it. You were kind of following the explanation he was giving, and then - boom. Maybe if you just wanted to . . .

THE CHAIR: You want to cede your time to the Liberal caucus?

GARY BURRILL: If he can finish the question, I'm sure our guest would like to give the answer to it.

THE CHAIR: Sure, okay. MLA Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: I guess I was only really making the point again. We heard it at a previous committee. We'll have a motion later today. We'll have a discussion related to encouraging more opportunities to collect data on our surveying and our veteran

community in terms of what government can do to help assist with establishing those data points and enabling opportunities for people to identify, volunteer that information. I only meant to highlight that point because I've heard it in previous years, in previous committees about how difficult it can be to track veterans once they leave the service.

Thank you for the opportunity, MLA Burrill. That was just more of a comment than a question. Maybe you have some feedback on that as well.

ELEANOR TAYLOR: I do, and I think you raise a really important point. The reality is that often the veterans who need the most help are the least likely to identify. I think on that specific point, I believe the solution to that is wrapping your arms around the family because the family of an acutely ill veteran is going to want to get them help in whatever way help is available. Making that help known publicly so that people are incentivized to go and identify their family member as a veteran and as needing help is, I think, a first step to accessing those people.

Another point that I would like to make is the reality exists that sometimes there are biases held about veterans that may prevent them from wanting to disclose their veteran status, especially in employment environments. There are some people who think that veterans are rigid, are broken, are not agile. For that reason, sometimes people will hesitate to identify their veteran status.

I would encourage both employers and governments that are seeking people to identify, to make it clear that they know that veterans not only serve, but are also contributing members of society, and to demonstrate that there are veterans amongst us who are doing wonderful things for our community, and we want to acknowledge them. That's one thing I think that might be worth looking at so that people aren't disincentivized to identify.

Finally, I think this speaks to why it's important to have an array of ways for veterans to connect with their community and services - so not choosing just one vehicle to invest in, but recognizing that veterans are not homogenous. Like all of us, we're all very different human beings. The CAF itself, service is very different across the four branches, so you have people gravitating toward different things. Making sure you've got an array of services and opportunities available for veterans to find what will connect them with their community, and what will enable them to contribute and will offer them support, is something to consider.

THE CHAIR: MLA Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: I was wondering if we could go to the third initiative you were talking about. You introduced it just in a brief way. You said that your thought was that building a Veteran Friendly Ontario was a model that we could think about learning something from in Nova Scotia. I wonder if you would explain what the picture is you have

in mind of things we might be able to have in Nova Scotia that we don't have now, if we were to implement this program?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Taylor.

ELEANOR TAYLOR: I think first, this is the first step for us to really understand what gaps might exist in Nova Scotia. What we would love to do, if there was interest in building a Veteran Friendly Nova Scotia, would be to have a conversation and consider what the mechanisms in place are to encourage veteran employment in Nova Scotia right now, and to assess the needs in Nova Scotia similar to the way we assess the needs of veterans in Ontario. They may be different. We can't take a one-province lens and apply it on another province. In the same way, you can't do that for veterans. What I know is that we are identifying in this work gaps that exist in the system that are creating challenges for veterans and creating challenges for employers.

For example, employers are interested in hiring veterans, but they don't know how to access them in many cases. They don't understand the skills veterans might bring to the table. They don't understand how to interpret a military resumé, and veterans are notoriously bad for being encouraged to be humble within the organization, so they do not advocate for themselves or their skill sets. What we have found is that there is a great employee and a great employer, and they are not connecting because they don't understand each other.

We think the same is likely true in other places and that it might be worth looking at the results - where we are in the pilot in Ontario - and consider whether or not some similar work might be relevant in Nova Scotia.

GARY BURRILL: The program is about employment support, employment assessment. That's what it really is concerning, that's the bulk of it.

ELEANOR TAYLOR: It is a three-tier project that is only one year long. The first tier is what you describe. It's looking at corporations that want to employ veterans, understanding what their gaps are, understanding what their needs are, and figuring out tools that might support them in their hiring objectives.

The second tier is looking at small businesses. We have a program where we are inviting veterans and small business owners to come together to learn about each other.

The third tier of that program is finding ways to incentivize people with a health care background from the Canadian Armed Forces who have transitioned to join health care professions in Ontario. So those three bands: tools for employers, helping the veterans and employers understand each other better at multiple levels, and finally, strengthening the health care system.

GARY BURRILL: There's of course a great deal of interest in this in the third part in Nova Scotia, primarily because of physician assistants. We know that through the years we've had so many physician assistants with a military background actually living in Nova Scotia, flying out, working everywhere, up north, out west. Very few of them - a few more now but not very many - working in Nova Scotia. What are some of the health care professions? Have you had enough of a chance to look at the scope of the program in Ontario to see what some of the health professions might be, in addition to physician assistants, that might be able to help?

ELEANOR TAYLOR: I'm not perfectly poised to answer that question on the types of professions, but I could get that information and bring it back. I will say that, as you know, people who come from the Maritimes like to come back to the Maritimes. Physician assistants from here would like to stay here. I certainly know that is attractive for the Nova Scotia health care system, but I don't have the details on the exact professions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms. Taylor. I would like to ask that if you do have any follow-up information you'd like to provide, if you could send it to the clerk. Then the clerk can disseminate it to our committee members.

MLA Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: Thinking about the program and the second section you've talked about - the small business part - do you have any sense of what form that might take? How veterans - what shape it's taking in Ontario? What shape it might take here?

ELEANOR TAYLOR: The program we are currently embarking on is being executed by a consultant partner who has done a lot of work in the veteran space. Their name is Challenge Factory. They have developed a program that gathers veterans, helps them understand the skills that they bring to the table, and helps them understand the challenges that small businesses face. It helps them understand that small businesses are ubiquitous - they're everywhere - and that you don't need to necessarily go out and get a job at a big corporation, but that you can find your home in a small business. It helps them understand some of the tools that they bring that could strengthen a small business.

We then do similar training with the small business owner, but the consultant partner offers other employment tools that incentivises our small business partners to join the initiative. Then they work on a problem together. The small business owner identifies a problem that they have, and then the veterans and small business owners work on the resolution of that problem together. We have found it to be really exciting. The small business owners have found that veterans can bring really unique solutions, agile solutions to the table.

GARY BURRILL: Problem-solving skills.

ELEANOR TAYLOR: Exactly, the problem-solving skills. That is the model that we're currently using. There's an online model, and there's an in-person model. They do the same material. We will be running our fourth cohort in Ottawa in February.

GARY BURRILL: This is all very exciting. You've said that we're in the first year of a three-year project in Ontario. No? I got that wrong?

ELEANOR TAYLOR: The Ontario employment and transition project is a one-year project, and it will be complete at the end of March. We then hope to export these learnings more broadly. The Veteran Volunteerism Initiative is a three-year program. It's a national program. It is nearing the end of its first year.

GARY BURRILL: I'm just trying to think about the Ontario pilot. What would be the steps required to get us to a place where that was being initiated in Nova Scotia?

ELEANOR TAYLOR: I think it would be, one, identifying if there was interest in having this discussion. I would bring our Chief Executive Officer Nick Booth to the table, and discuss how it is we might bring something like this. What are the needs that Nova Scotia has? How might we adjust this program so it meets those needs? Then we would write a proposal if there was interest in that to move forward.

GARY BURRILL: I'm just trying to get a sense of practically what would be required. Write a proposal to whom?

ELEANOR TAYLOR: It would be to the Province of Nova Scotia. It is the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development in Ontario that is spearheading this, so a similar alignment might be - yes.

GARY BURRILL: Thank you for explaining about that. It sounds like it has a lot of potential.

I want to go back - you were speaking about the general purpose and mission of True Patriot Love. You were talking about helping families and veterans deal with - you said something like issues arising from multiple deployments and families moving, lots of fractured experiences. Do you think that the forces as a whole have come to a place of a better understanding in recent years about the negative impact of multiple deployments on families? We've seen so much evidence over so many years. Do you have a sense that the forces are registering this in a deeper way than was true a few years ago?

ELEANOR TAYLOR: I am not the right person to answer that question. What I know is that multiple deployments is still a reality for serving members. That is true. So this problem is a real problem, and it will persist. It's not just a today problem. The problem is a multi-generational problem. I think that's about all I can say on that.

[2:45 p.m.]

GARY BURRILL: I wanted to ask you an unrelated question, not about the part of the organization's work that you've spoken about, but about the Invictus Games. This seems like a pretty exciting project that the organization has got coming up. I know it's not one of the things you chose to highlight, but would you take a couple of minutes and tell us about what's on offer? What's going to be offered out west in 2025? It sounds exciting.

ELEANOR TAYLOR: Yes, the Invictus Games is very exciting. Invictus Games is being hosted in Canada in the Winter of 2025. It's the first time ever that Invictus Games has had a Winter sports event. For those who are not familiar with Invictus Games, it is an opportunity for people who have served, who are injured, to go and develop community through a sporting event. It's an international, transformational, inspirational event.

True Patriot Love has a leading role in Invictus in that we made the bid to Invictus Games, and we brought the games to Canada. But there's an organization that has its own board called Invictus Games 2025, which is the organizing committee for the Games itself and they are going to execute the games. They have an enormous volunteer program. They're going to have thousands of volunteers in support of that event, and we are going to have, I believe, over 40 nations participating in the Invictus Games in 2025. It is an extraordinarily exciting event for Canada, and we are deeply invested in it.

THE CHAIR: MLA Burrill - your questioning is done? Okay. We will now move on to the governing PC caucus.

MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: So far, it's been so interesting. In your opening statement, virtual hub - you had a lot in there, I guess, about it. I'm just wondering if you could explain in detail how it works and the different types of services? This is something I want to push on my Facebook, but I want a better understanding.

ELEANOR TAYLOR: The Veteran Hub is built on a forward-facing platform. There is no access information that you need to get at it. We did that deliberately because we didn't want anyone to have to give anything or be disincentivized to come to the Hub. We want everybody to come to the Hub.

When you go to the page, you can click the first button and it will take you to a map of Canada. You can zoom in on your part of Canada and see pins on the map. Right now, the pins on the map are all the same colour, but in our next version of the build, we're going to grow it into a Phase 2. We will give the user a better way by which they can see things in colours. You'll see volunteering opportunities in one colour, you'll see services in another colour, you'll see federal services in a different colour - but it will be more filterable.



Right now, what you see is a series of pins. You can click on those pins, and it takes you to the link of that organization, and you can explore that organization. It is not a complicated site; it's a simple site. Organizations can self-register, and we then just click "approve." If somebody is serving the veteran community - the veteran, the military, or the family community - we encourage them to register if they offer specific services or if they offer an opportunity to volunteer. If they have an event - if you have a veteran event happening, they can put that event pin on the page.

You can search by keyword, or you can search through the map. Our hope is that if we can help people see that this is a way by which they can communicate to veterans the services that are available to them, we will have closed a significant gap. As I said in the earlier comments, one of the things people struggle with is that you know there's a lot out there, but there are a thousand different webpages that you need to go to, to figure out what might be relevant for you. We hope to make it easier by helping them see things geographically.

There's also, of course, a way to search by virtual event. If it's a virtual service, a virtual volunteering opportunity, or a virtual event, we have an overlay for that too.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Thank you. I'll have to Google that when I get home and manoeuvre around a little bit.

My father was in the military, and he, I think, mid-80s retired. I think back, more so the last few years since I've been on the Veterans Affairs Committee, and I think back to the year that he took off from the time we moved home to the time he actually became employed. I used to torment him. He became addicted to *Another World* and *Days of Our Lives*. God rest his soul, he's not angry at me. I know he's not because he didn't mind sharing it. (Laughs) I think back, and the more I think back, I kind of see the challenges he had in trying to transition over.

In your experience, what are the unique challenges faced by veterans during their transition to civilian life? How does the virtual hub specifically address those challenges? That would be a good way to put it, I think.

ELEANOR TAYLOR: Some of the challenges that veterans face - you can group them in different categories because there are different types of veterans. There are veterans who had to leave their time in uniform because of an illness or injury, and those people have a set of needs that need to be addressed. They leave a health care system that was there for them, was accessible, was far less burdened than the public health care system. They move into the public health care system. They take all of their records in paper form to a doctor who doesn't want a paper document, and in some cases, they have very complex health care needs, and that transition is really, really challenging.

Even for myself - I transitioned as a relatively healthy person after 27 years of service, finding a family doctor, and then finding one who understood the toll that 27 years of service in the infantry takes on a body. Then that relationship between the family physician and Veterans Affairs Canada - it is a black box for most physicians. They are too busy as it is with their caseloads, so helping veterans access the services that are available to them requires that health care lift - that health care hand. That can sometimes be really hard. There is meeting the health care needs, which is a challenge. Then there is meeting the employment need.

The military culture, as some of you know, is a unique culture with a unique language. The experiences in many cases overlay very well civilian businesses, but articulating how they overlay is very challenging because the veteran has no insight into what that is that they're overlaying on top of, and the employer has no insight into what a deployment in Afghanistan might mean for them. Yet these experiences can really bring value in civilian organizations: leadership experiences, operating under pressure, creative thinking, problem solving, all of these things, but we don't communicate that. We don't have a good bridge right now to help people see that alignment. That's another challenge: the employment challenge.

Another is the connection challenge, as we've talked about. You had been part of something that was bigger than yourself and you had sacrificed for that. You might have lost - you've lost friends. Maybe your family has broken up. Maybe your children are suffering. You then leave service and you're on the other side, and none of it matters. You can feel very disconnected. You can feel like all of that is not understood. That's when the veteran connection becomes so important - because in some cases, the sacrifice is huge, and then you're just another guy or another girl going to work in a suit. So then that community connection can be really life-saving for some people.

Those are the three categories: the medical, the employment, and then the connection piece. The Hub can help as a first step to help people. If you don't know where to start, the Hub is a great place to start. What's out there for my community? Then there's work to find out what's going to work for me.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: That was well said. My mind was triggered every time you went through each one of those, even the community connection. Being from Lunenburg County and coming home after being overseas for four years, and not knowing anybody, and people not understanding things like going on tours, being dropped in the middle of nowhere, and stuff like that. I think you did a really great job of explaining that.

Can you discuss the challenges that come with promoting and facilitating veteran volunteerism and the strategies used to overcome them?

ELEANOR TAYLOR: We haven't encountered problems promoting veteran volunteerism because we haven't done it, right? We just haven't built the data to say that

this is really good for our community - the veteran community and Canadian community - so we don't have an anchor point right now to really promote it, but we intend to. We intend to build that anchor point because we know it's there. Then we will leverage all of the communication tools that are available to us, I know that we as a foundation have not done promotion beyond this initiative, and that we're working on this initiative.

[3:00 p.m.]

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: You have brought up so many different things here today between the line of questioning from everyone. I'm wondering if you could talk about the key focus areas of the foundation, explaining why you prioritize these areas.

ELEANOR TAYLOR: I think because that's where we see the greatest need. I think we see the greatest need in employment. We see the greatest need in establishing purpose. We are also working on a project that will help us take health records from the Canadian Armed Forces and make them available digitally for physicians. That project is under way. I can't speak to the details of it, but we recognize that's a gap and we are working on fixing that.

The foundation has been around since 2009, and has a good understanding of the needs of the community. We've chosen to prioritize this way because we think we'll have the greatest impact in these domains.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I'm going to try to sneak in my last little - a second part to this. Do you expect the focus to shift in the future? If so, how do you make that determination? Is there research done initially or collaboratively that helps make these decisions within the organization?

ELEANOR TAYLOR: We have very strong strategic partnerships with Veterans Affairs Canada and with the Canadian Armed Forces. We are recipients of all of their research. We carefully analyze the research to get an understanding of where they believe the need is, and then work collaboratively to try to address that need. Indeed, things in the future will shift as needs become more imminent in certain areas, and we will seek to address those needs.

We are connected not only with research from Veterans Affairs Canada, but we are a very proud funder of CIMVHR, the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research. That is a platform that both funds and then communicates research in that field - nationally and internationally. I had the privilege to attend the last two forums. There is a lot of really exciting research that's happening, both in Canada and internationally, that's relevant to the work that we do.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I'm going to pass the remaining time to MLA Taggart.

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: Ms. Taylor, before I start, typically we've got three or four witnesses here and people get a break. Would you care to have a little - are you talked out? Are you okay, or do you want to take a break? Thank you. You're doing a great job.

I think MLA Barkhouse spoke about triggering things. I just have to say before I go to my questions that this has been a great conversation. There are a couple of things that I want to comment on. One was that it's disappointing to me that sometimes veterans don't feel like contributing members of society. I'm fortunate in a way - I come from a very small community with a tremendous number of mostly Navy veterans and soon-to-be Navy veterans.

I just want to make sure that I get it on the record that they are absolutely contributing factors. They've been in the community for a long time, but they're a huge part of our community. I believe that certainly also coming out of the Navy, oftentimes they have skills that they've been trained for. I believe that a wise military person takes advantage of those and builds those skills to come out, so they are truly a valuable part of our community. I think employers notice that more and more.

I am shocked that the military still does not have digital medical records. We've gone through that in my community where our doctors left, and they didn't have digital records and the challenges that we faced. So I know what the military folks face. They still don't have digital records?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Taylor.

ELEANOR TAYLOR: They have digital records that are not transferrable to the provincial health care system. They need to be printed before you go or burned on a CD. We know how many people have CD readers now. (Laughter)

TOM TAGGART: MLA Burrill asked some awesome questions here - in particular, the question about trained medical people in the military. I know that not too long ago, a lot of their training was the accepted within a pretty closed house - some of the different medical professions, doctors, nurses, whatever. Recently, we've opened that up a little bit for other countries and other - take a test and all that kind of stuff. Do you know if any of those improvements have been made available to the paramedics - whatever the medical term was for folks who were pretty highly trained?

My friend said that as long as he was talking to a doctor, he could amputate a leg, so long as he had a doctor on the other - have we moved any on that? I think that and the digital records are places where we could really make some hay there. What's your answer to that?

ELEANOR TAYLOR: As I unfortunately said, I don't have the detail about which of those professions are transferable. But I, 100 per cent, see that finding a way to take every possible resource from the Canadian Armed Forces and putting it into the provincial health care system is something we would want to do. I commit to getting more on that and sending it to the committee.

TOM TAGGART: I'll probably inquire on that too, because I think things have changed.

What future plans does the True Patriot Love Foundation have for expanding or enhancing its grants and programs to better support the evolving needs of military veterans?

ELEANOR TAYLOR: As I mentioned, and as you may see in the remarks, we have granting mechanisms that range from focusing on the specific needs of women serving members and veterans, and then a community program that focuses on things like camps for children, employment and transition, those veteran organizations that support communities. We have the Bell True Patriot Love Fund, which really focuses on mental health. We have only recently stood up a creative arts fund, because we recognize the benefit of the creative arts in its support to well-being.

Those are the vehicles that we use to fund the needs, and we think that those vehicles fund the entirety of the needs that are in the veteran and family communities. We think we have set up the vehicle to make a difference in all those domains. Of course, we are an organization that sometimes is limited by funds, so we always seek funding where we think we can make a difference - both privately and also through federal and provincial mechanisms - but that, of course, can be a limiter.

THE CHAIR: We'll move back to our second round of questioning to the Liberal caucus. Each caucus from here will get 10 minutes each.

MLA Jessome.

HON. BEN JESSOME: In your opening remarks, you referenced "since 2009." Does that mean the organization has been around since 2009?

ELEANOR TAYLOR: Yes.

BEN JESSOME: Thank you for clarifying that. You spoke about a number of the initiatives that are presently ongoing. I'm wondering if you could comment a little bit on some of the wins or past projects that the organization has been involved with, and give us a sense of some of the things that you've worked on previously that have demonstrated or proven to be useful for military vets or the organization.

ELEANOR TAYLOR: One of the things that I didn't speak about was the work that True Patriot Love does through sport. One of the vehicles we use to enable veteran and military member well-being is through our expeditions. We have, since 2012, done some life-changing expeditions to parts of the world where we take veterans who are ill or injured and pair them with community leaders, and we send them on an adventure to the North Pole or the Himalayas or Antarctica or Petawawa River.

We take them outside. We expose them to hardship and challenge together, and we help the community leaders see the kinds of sacrifices that have been made by military members and their families, and the impact that it has had on them. We help the veterans and the serving members see that there are people on the other side who care about them, who are invested in their success, and who want to see them do well once they leave service in uniform - and while they retain the uniform, of course.

We've had really positive feedback on that program, because it supports both communities. It helps the civilian community leaders see - really see - both the issues and the potential, and it helps the military members develop connections that can support them on the other side. (Inaudible) . . . research now on how adventure and hardship can create a vehicle for growth, which, if properly supported, can be transformative.

BEN JESSOME: I'm going to shift back to the work and the conversation around understanding the language between what military veterans have experienced, and what they could be applied to in the civilian workforce. You referenced the work that's ongoing in Ontario. Does the military have that type of service within their exit strategy? What is it, specifically? I should know this, but I'm looking for a reminder here.

ELEANOR TAYLOR: The military has an organization called the Canadian Armed Forces Transition Group. They are mandated to support serving members as they transition out of uniform, and to set the conditions for their success in the next bound.

One of the things that we are working with them to support is that while they understand the member and what the member needs, they may not have that same depth of understanding about what the employer needs and the challenges the employer faces when they're trying to find veterans. What are those stumbling blocks that veterans face during the interview process, and how do we get through that? Why is it that veterans often leave within the first 90 days of employment, and how do you mitigate that? These are some of the things that are coming out of the pilot that we're working on in Ontario that are very interesting, and we think could be helpful elsewhere.

Examples of things that we're learning are that within a company, standing up a veteran employee resource group is helpful. They then can support each other in that sense of community, and you can take people from that group and bring them on to hiring boards. That individual can then help do that knowledge-transfer piece, so when the veteran can't articulate their skills, the person on the hiring board might be able to share a bit of insight.

[3:15 p.m.]

Also, knowing the ways by which we can recruit into that community - it can be perceived as a bit of a spider's web when you're trying to get reserve community, regular force community, family community, veterans, transitioning members. That's a lot of different organizations that you need to have a way to connect with. What we hope to try to do is encourage that spiderweb to come together into something that's closer to a pipe. The Canadian Armed Forces Transition Group is indeed working on this too.

BEN JESSOME: Is there a reason other than government is the primary shepherd of military affairs, other than the Forces themselves - has your organization ever considered partnerships with recruitment agencies? It seems more corporate than perhaps - I don't know whether they would fit the need, the mould, the situation, but I'm just curious: Has your organization had conversations with or explored partnerships with recruitment agencies beyond the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration in Nova Scotia, for example?

ELEANOR TAYLOR: One of the things that we want to be clear about is that we don't want to get into the business of hiring veterans. We want to share the knowledge that will enable organizations across Canada to hire veterans. To answer your question directly, yes, we have explored, to some extent, these organizations.

In our early research, we found some organizations that focus on veteran hiring. They specialize in veteran hiring. Often, they have veterans on staff, and they know how to find them. One of the tools that we've brought to the table for our Ontario project is a virtual collaborative space where we bring the employers and the enablers from the Canadian Armed Forces Transition Group, Veterans Affairs Canada, Military Family Services, and some of these veteran hiring specialists that we've come across, so they can collaborate together. We want to create the connections, not necessarily engage the hiring companies.

THE CHAIR: MLA Ince.

HON. TONY INCE: I'm interested in hearing you explain a little bit more about the Veteran Volunteerism advisory council. Is that a national council?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Taylor.

ELEANOR TAYLOR: Yes. That's a national council. We hope to get a representative from every province that is producing one of the program partners. We would be delighted to find somebody from Nova Scotia who would sit on that council, who would help us as we develop our evaluation framework for our program partners, and would help us as we consider the strategy that we will develop in year three - then

ultimately have that individual leverage their network to make sure we're getting the tools provincially into the right hands.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the NDP caucus. MLA Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: You're a very clear explainer. Thank you. I wanted to go back to an explanation you were giving to MLA Taggart earlier. You were saying about moving into the area of creative arts funds. This is a new thing. Are you talking about the work of Soldier On? I want to be able to speak about the relationship of True Patriot Love to Soldier On.

ELEANOR TAYLOR: Soldier On is responsible to train and manage Team Canada. Soldier On is largely funded by the Canadian Armed Forces and CFMWS. They have a relationship to the Canadian Armed Forces Transition Group and the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare System, and True Patriot Love is also a funder of Soldier On. Soldier On generates teams for sporting events across the world, but specifically for Team Canada for Invictus Games, and we're a proud partner of Soldier On.

GARY BURRILL: In Soldier On, is the creative arts component part of that as well?

ELEANOR TAYLOR: No. I think Soldier On might do some work with creative arts, but that's separate from our Military Creative Arts Initiative, where we have actively gone out to find program partners who are delivering creative arts activities for veterans to support well-being. Our creative arts initiative is not their medically therapeutic; it supports well-being. But we recognize that relationship between well-being and creative arts, and we are invested and committed to continuing to fund those activities.

GARY BURRILL: If I understand then, True Patriot Love is actually directly developing creative arts therapy within programming.

ELEANOR TAYLOR: To be clear about that, we are leveraging pre-existing program partners who are already delivering this and we're funding them, or we're encouraging them to further develop. That's a funding relationship.

GARY BURRILL: Would you like to speak at all to the way that creative arts therapy-related programming fits in with the overall mission of veterans of True Patriot Love, the whole program?

ELEANOR TAYLOR: Our overall mission is to support veterans, serving members, and their families through every stage of their journey. There has been a lot of research on the beneficial relationship between engagement in creative arts and well-being. Also, our allies in the Five Eyes nations have also invested in this. We too had a three-year creative arts program where we went out to try to find what is out there in Canada, what



creative arts programs are being offered. We also did an evaluation of those programs to try to get an understanding of the impact of that kind of activity on well-being. That will inform our funding moving forward so that we have the best impact.

GARY BURRILL: These are the things I wanted to ask. Thank you, Chair.

THE CHAIR: Okay, we'll move over to the PC caucus. MLA Harrison, I believe you will begin this round.

LARRY HARRISON: Individual outcomes - I'm going to tell this story. A number of years ago, I knew a chaplain in the armed services, and I asked him how he was doing. Well, I soon found out. He did some counselling, of course, with folks with PTSD. The stories were such that he actually absorbed those stories within himself, and he couldn't function anymore in that job. That was a bad outcome for an individual, no question. I'm just wondering if you could share any personal outcomes from the programs that True Patriot Love has?

ELEANOR TAYLOR: First, I'll speak to that point that you raise about caring for the caregiver. It is something that we are acutely aware of - that this exposure to the trauma that somebody is sharing can have an impact on the caregiver. That, over time - and sometimes not even over time - can have a significant impact on their health. We recognize that, and we recognize that our program partners are at the front line every single day and encourage them to make sure they are properly trained so they don't burn out as they try to help folks.

I speak all the time to people who have found True Patriot Love's activities - specifically the expeditions because that's where we interact with people directly. Our expeditions - our Warrior Sailing. We get feedback that this has saved somebody's life - that if this had not happened, they were going down a path to suicide; that this connected them with the resources in their communities that allowed them and their families to get the help they needed and turn a corner. It helped them to turn a corner and move their life in the right direction. The programs that we fund also have those experiences every single day, where you've got an individual who's going down a path to a very terrible outcome, and they get moved into the right path.

Beyond that, for privacy reasons, I can't reveal the details.

LARRY HARRISON: I really do appreciate your comments on that. Could you tell a little bit more about the actual mental health programs that True Patriot Love is involved with?

ELEANOR TAYLOR: Yes, there's an array. There are hundreds of programs that we are funding across Canada. I can share one that I participated in myself as a veteran. True Patriot Love has a funding relationship with Wounded Warriors Canada. I put my

kids in the Warrior Kids program, which is a program that supports children who have a parent with an operational-stress injury. It was a wonderful program. It was a program that allowed kids to connect with other kids who have similar experiences. It normalized it. It gave them language to talk about issues that may be facing their family. It gave them tools to deal with the challenges that their family may face - ways to address things. I can say that that was a great program for our family.

There are hundreds of these kinds of programs that exist that are being funded by True Patriot Love.

LARRY HARRISON: Thank you. Continue on with the work you're doing, please.

I'm going to hand it over now to MLA Craig.

THE CHAIR: MLA Craig.

HON. STEVE CRAIG: Ms. Taylor, first of all, thank you for your service to our country. As a young adult signing up - Afghanistan, Kosovo, Bosnia. The experiences and leadership that you have obtained over your 27 years, I believe it is, in service to our country - your family engagement, your leadership, your training. You are the personification of a true community engagement professional and an advocate for True Patriot Love Foundation, in such a professional and competent way that I cannot find the words to express other than my gratitude for you being here today. It's a pleasure to meet you, and it's a pleasure to be in your company.

When we talk about volunteerism - I come from a community in Lower Sackville that was built by basically volunteer military people. Quite often, I would be faced with answering the question of many people in other communities as to why Lower Sackville had so much, and my response typically is that it's because we had a great military community of both serving members and retired members who weren't afraid to roll up their sleeves and do the work and what they thought was possible. I truly believe that. I believe it today as a military brat, if you will - a Navy brat.

Again, when it comes to everything you spoke of - everything you spoke of resonated not only with me but, I would dare say, the other members of this committee, in a very positive, resounding way. Again, thank you for that.

I have very limited time to ask a question, but I did want to express my thoughts of gratitude to you before I ask the question, because I thought, in my mind and hopefully yours, that would probably be the most appropriate thing to do with the remaining time that I have.

Here we go. I think this will be a breeze of a question and will be a breeze of a response. How does the True Patriot Love Foundation actively engage with Veterans

Affairs Canada, corporate partners, and local charities to address the evolving needs of veterans? Do you share data? Do you have regular meetings? What's the research? You touched on all of that today. How about addressing some of the key challenges, and also perhaps one or two of the key successes you've had in the work that you and the Foundation have done since 2009 and you since 2022?

[3:30 p.m.]

ELEANOR TAYLOR: True Patriot Love invests in our strategic partnerships. We are very grateful for our strategic partnerships. We have a very strong board that is connected to the community. We also, for every major initiative, stand up an advisory board. For example, we have the advisory board for the Veteran Volunteerism Initiative. We hope to bring a representative from Volunteer Canada to make sure we have that kind of expertise, and then appropriate representation from federal and provincial experts who can guide us.

We also have regular meetings, at both the strategic level and at the operational level with Veterans Affairs Canada and the Canadian Armed Forces to make sure we're connected with the need as they see it, and the research that exists. We always share research and we share the outcomes of our projects. You would see that for any of the major projects, we would share with those program partners who were involved with us and also make public. Our work with Ontario will be made public. We're very conscientious about that.

In addition, for our disbursements, we have a Disbursement Advisory Committee separate from the board. We have representation from the Canadian Armed Forces on that committee and we have representation from military families. We have representation from the veteran community. We make sure that our beneficiary's voice is loud and clear in the disbursement oversight committee.

I'll speak quickly about one of my accomplishments. I've been with the Foundation only since 2022, but I started to volunteer with the Foundation in 2018. I was part of the Nichola Goddard Leadership Series, and I had the opportunity to speak as part of those leadership panels. Since I've come to the foundation, I got my hands dirty in building a Veteran Hub. I actually worked with a series of developers. We built the hub with accessibility in mind. We now have the hub up and running, and we want to grow that hub. Seeing that from vision to execution was really a great accomplishment for me personally, and I think the Foundation as well.

THE CHAIR: That concludes our question and answer period here this afternoon. We'd like to give you an opportunity to provide some closing statements. You've been a fount of fantastic information today. We'd like to give you an opportunity to share any closing statements or thoughts you may have.

ELEANOR TAYLOR: Simply thank you so much for having me here today. It has been a true pleasure. I am always inspired by the interest in veteran issues. The questions were insightful. I am very happy to know that Nova Scotia as a province has this level of engagement, and I really look forward to our future collaboration.

THE CHAIR: Again, on behalf of our committee, thank you for what you're doing with True Patriot Love. Thank you for your service. We will take about a four minute recess just to tend to some committee business after that. We'll allow you time to leave. Thank you again for coming today. We stand in recess.

[3:35 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[3:39 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Order. I call this meeting back to order. We will attend to some committee business. You'll see a little change we're going to make in addition to a piece of committee business that I'm going to address first. It has to do with our next topic - the final topic in our agenda, in our list of topics for this round.

It came to my attention that the topic The Use and Availability of Veterans Affairs Canada Long-Term Care Beds in Nova Scotia has listed witnesses there, but it came to my attention that the original motion put forward by the NDP caucus during agenda setting did not have the witnesses that are listed there. I am going to bring it back to committee business. I'd like to give MLA Burrill the opportunity to put a motion forward for that topic and add in whatever witnesses he needs to add there for the topic.

MLA Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: My motion will be that the witnesses we request will be the deputy minister of the department and the president of the Royal Canadian Legion Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command.

THE CHAIR: What department are you referring to, MLA Burrill?

GARY BURRILL: The Department of Seniors and Long-term Care.

THE CHAIR: There is a motion on the table. Any discussion?

MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: We want to bring in people who can speak directly and specifically on this topic so that we can get clarity for veterans. I would like to make a friendly amendment to your motion. For the topic The Use and Availability of Veterans Affairs Canada Long-Term Care Beds in Nova Scotia, I move that the following witnesses

be called: a representative from Veterans Affairs Canada, a representative from Camp Hill, a representative from the Nova Scotia Health Authority, the Royal Canadian Legion Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command, and I would like to drop the deputy minister of Seniors and Long-term Care.

THE CHAIR: That is an amended motion. We have an amendment to the original motion. Is there discussion? MLA Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: Point of order. I don't think the amendment is in order because it contradicts the main point of the motion, which is the deputy minister of the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care. If the amendment seeks the exact opposite of that, it is therefore not an amendment but a different motion.

THE CHAIR: MLA Burrill, my understanding from speaking with the counsel is the member just put forward an amendment to your motion. Whether it flies contradictory or anything, it's just her ability to make an amendment to your motion here at the table. I will rule that the amendment is in order. MLA Jessome.

HON. BEN JESSOME: Just curious what the motive is to leave out the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care that would be . . .

THE CHAIR: I'll go back to MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: The contract is signed between Nova Scotia Health Authority and Veterans Affairs Canada. Because it is clinical, the NSHA does the management of the beds. We need them in there because they're the ones who actually do the work, whereas the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care does not.

I just think bringing in the right representatives who can actually answer the questions that we're going to have is appropriate. We do not want to bring a department in - although it's very deceiving, Seniors and Long-term Care - that's not actually how it works within the departments.

THE CHAIR: Seeing no further discussion, we will vote on the amended motion.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Now we'll go back to the original motion. We have to vote on the original motion as well? (Interruptions) We vote on the amended motion.

MLA Burrill.

[3:45 p.m.]

GARY BURRILL: There is no motion remaining to vote on by reason of the content of the amendment. The amendment has nullified the two points in the original motion. (Interruption)

THE CHAIR: Now we will vote on the motion as amended. Thank you for the clarification.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We have a confirmed witness list and topic for next month. We'll ask our clerk to do his best to get those witnesses there.

We will go back to the discussion around the letter that was drafted and sent by our clerk to the Legislative clerks of each provincial legislature asking how veterans and veteran organizations' issues are addressed, along with the 2022-23 Veterans Affairs Committee annual report attached to it. There have been a few responses. I'm assuming everyone in the committee has received those from the clerk - from a few provinces - the responses from the Legislative clerks directing the committee to contact ministers of Military Affairs or equivalents with this inquiry.

Was there any discussion? MLA Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: Just a suggestion that hopefully committee members will agree with. Let's find ourselves in a holding pattern until we get a few more responses or not. Maybe just wait a meeting or two, whatever it is, just to see how much feedback we get from other jurisdictions to add to what information we have to date.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: We agree with that. It would be nice to hear from the rest.

THE CHAIR: I think we have agreements around that. No further discussion on that letter.

We will move on to a deferred motion by MLA Jessome that was left from our last meeting - that the committee write letters to the Executive Council to include identifiers for Canadian Armed Forces members and veterans for program applications. What I'd like to do is ask MLA Jessome to maybe read the motion, and then we can have a discussion around that.

BEN JESSOME: If I may, the intent of the motion was not to provide a directive to members of our Cabinet. I don't believe that we as a committee have the authority to direct ministers, so it was more of a reference to what we heard at committee. I think what we heard at committee last month, and in extension, what we heard today at committee about the absence of data - to support the work of organizations like this, and to advocate for veterans more broadly.

I would suggest that the motion should read that the committee write to the Executive Council to suggest including identifiers for Canadian Armed Forces members and veterans for program applications. It's just, I think, a little thing that we can do as a committee to help add to the data sets that are out there so that organizations like True Patriot Love that we saw today have a more robust set of information to lean on when conducting their advocacy more generally.

THE CHAIR: Technically, I believe that you made an amendment to your own motion because it's different from the original motion. I've been informed that it's an amendment to your motion. We have a new motion - an amended motion on the table. Any discussion? MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: I'm searching for the benefit of this identifier. What's the outcome of being tagged or identified as Canadian Armed Forces or veterans? What's the rationale or the outcome?

BEN JESSOME: I'll use health care as the example - health information specific to people who identify as African Nova Scotians. It was an intentional move to put that type of an identifier on applications to try to increase the amount of information that we have specific to that portion of our population in the interest of improving health outcomes. In a similar regard, we've heard on two back-to-back meetings the separate groups of witnesses testify to the fact that information is lacking about veterans. We have groups that are trying to be intentional outside of government about acquiring more data to support the work that they're doing to advocate on behalf of veterans.

I'm certain that the fact that we have the ear of the government in different departments, if they set up their programs or their applications in such a way with a checkbox, someone could choose to identify as a serving Canadian Armed Forces member or a veteran. That would improve upon the available datasets that are out there for the purposes of how we create better outcomes to serve this part of our population.

THE CHAIR: MLA Craig.

HON. STEVE CRAIG: I appreciate where the member is going with this. However, I don't believe we have the jurisdiction or the authority to utilize the data, let alone collect it. Any organization that has been asking for it has been doing so in the population of

veterans and those across Canada, not necessarily here. We've already taken steps to see what others are doing across Canada - legislatures and so on.

I just feel that there are privacy concerns. We should not be gathering data that we won't utilize. To what ends would the Province utilize this data? I'm not aware of any programs that we have tailored specifically to veterans here. The federal government has, but I'm not aware of any myself. To me, it just seems to be something that, there's no real benefit of doing this - not to the Province, and not to this committee.

Yes, we are aware that certain groups - a lot of groups, in fact, and the veterans, by virtue of the fact that we have a Veterans Affairs Committee - we realize the importance of our veterans and the things that we're doing here, which no other province is doing, is very important. This here particular motion though - to inform or direct Cabinet to do something in this particular space - is not appropriate in my mind. Therefore, I would not be supporting the amendment or anything along that line for those particular reasons.

Is it important that our veterans and organizations who are trying to gather data get data to make informed decisions? Absolutely. I do not believe, though, at this particular point, that it is this group here that would initiate that, and anybody on the receiving end of that would ask the same question: to what end? We have privacy legislation, so we should not be collecting data that we are not going to utilize.

Also, when it comes to hearing directly from the military community, have we heard anything directly from the military community? By those I would mean those serving organizations, like the area officers in charge of the Atlantic region, that they need this particular data to be able to better serve members as well.

Just briefly, Chair, those are the reasons why I would not support this motion nor anything along that line, amendment or not.

THE CHAIR: We will address the amended motion that MLA Jessome has on the table.

MLA Jessome, do you want to speak to that?

BEN JESSOME: With respect to collecting data that you're not going to use, I would think that it would become useful in terms of advocating to the needs of that particular part of the population. We otherwise wouldn't have it. If jurisdictional boundaries limit our capabilities, then at the very least, this would provide us with a data set that we could use to serve our advocacy work to the federal government to say, if there's an identifier on - we had an interest from a department at our previous meeting who said that they would go back and look into this.



I feel like this is a bit nauseating, having to explain why this is valuable. I think we've all sat around this table and acknowledged that we can and should, through this committee, support our veterans. It's rich that we can't get agreement on something as basic and simple and non-partisan as this. It's something that we've clearly heard subsequent witnesses ask for in terms of, we need better data about veterans. We have the tools as government, if we decide to show a little bit of leadership on this and simply state to ministers: This is what we heard from subsequent witnesses who have limited resources. We can do this favour.

As far as privacy goes, we're not supposed to share specific information about people's individual circumstances. But if we can say that there are applicants for housing or income assistance, things like that, we can say that X number of people who are applying for income assistance are veterans. That, to me, would express in a very intentional way what the need is for that part of our population, and hopefully increase the outcomes with respect to serving our military members or our retired military members.

We can wrap this up if it's not going to be - anyway, it's shocking that we can't get behind this.

THE CHAIR: MLA Craig, did you have one more comment?

STEVE CRAIG: I appreciate that the member feels nauseated and has been at this for 10 years - two of which have been under this administration and the previous eight under another administration. This committee greatly cares about veterans - there is no doubt about that - in everything we do. What we're talking about has the appropriate authority and responsibility to provide for our veterans in a more direct way. That is extremely important. I don't want to water it down or continue it, but I would suggest that every member on this committee has veterans in their heart in everything that we do.

I'll leave it at that, and I'm ready to call for the vote.

THE CHAIR: We will address the amended motion that MLA Jessome put forward.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is defeated.

Now we'll go back to the original motion on the table from MLA Jessome.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is defeated.

Is there any other committee business? MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: Point of order, Chair. I'm sure I won't get through it, but I want to get it on the record here.

Last meeting, the member from Hammonds Plains-Lucasville said, "I hope that this committee will make good on their commitment to take on a reinvigorated, updated mandate to enhance the work that we do as a provincial government." I just want to clarify that this committee did not make any such commitment. It's my view that in the context that it was spoken, it was with respect to current serving Canadian Armed Forces members. We've had that discussion . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. The time for our meeting has come to an end.

Our topic for our next meeting is the Use and Availability of Veterans Affairs Canada Long-term Care Beds in Nova Scotia. Our witnesses will be representatives from Veterans Affairs Canada, Camp Hill, Nova Scotia Health Authority, the Royal Canadian Legion Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command. At that, we stand adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 4:00 p.m.]