

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Tuesday, April 22, 2025

COMMITTEE ROOM

Agenda-Setting

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VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Melissa Sheehy-Richard (Chair)

Ryan Robicheau (Vice Chair)

Chris Palmer

Nick Hilton

Damian Stoilov

Suzy Hansen

Paul Wozney

Hon. Iain Rankin

Hon. Derek Mombourquette

[Paul Wozney was replaced by Lina Hamid.]

In Attendance:

Tamer Nusseibeh
Legislative Committee Clerk

Philip Grassie
Legislative Counsel



HALIFAX, TUESDAY, APRIL 22, 2025

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

10:00 A.M.

CHAIR

Melissa Sheehy-Richard

Vice Chair

Ryan Robicheau

THE CHAIR: Order. I call this meeting to order.

This is the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. I'm Melissa Sheehy-Richard, the MLA for Hants West and Chair of this committee. Today, we will discuss organizational matters and hold agenda-setting.

I'll remind everybody to please turn your devices to silent. In case of emergency, we use the Granville Street exit and walk up to Grand Parade.

I will now ask the committee members to introduce themselves for the record by stating their name and constituency, beginning with MLA Robicheau.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I also wanted to note the presence of Legislative Counsel Philip Grassie to my left, and Legislative Committee Clerk Tamer Nusseibeh to my right.

This is the first meeting of the Veterans Affairs Committee in this session; therefore, the committee must choose how to conduct the procedures. The committee guide and reference document has been distributed to all members, and I will now provide an overview of the committee's mandate.

Although Section 60.2 of the Rules and Forms of Procedures of the House of Assembly does not provide a mandate for the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, it is the understanding that it was established for the purpose of considering matters pertaining to veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces and Royal Canadian Legion. Members, legislative staff, caucus researchers, and Legislative Counsel Office staff attend these meetings. Meetings are televised, live-streamed, and open to the public.

First up are the committee meeting procedures. We will talk about the meeting schedule. The committee typically is held on the third Tuesday of the month from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. in the Committee Room at One Government Place. Does the committee wish to continue with this timeline? The committee, however, does not meet during the Summer months - I want to mention that as well - July and August, or when the House sits.

I guess I did two in one. We'll start with the first one.

MLA Stoilov.

DAMIAN STOILOV: I'd like to move that the Veterans Affairs Committee's monthly meeting time be from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. on the third Tuesday of every month. The rationale is to be more consistent with some of the other committee meetings that are during the same time frame - from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. - for driving privileges for those coming from away and for scheduling purposes.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion on the motion?

MLA Hansen.

SUZY HANSEN: My only concern would be what would be best for the committee. I know there are other committees happening, so if there's a scheduling conflict, the timing would be based on that. I don't know if the clerks could give us an idea if another committee is on that day.

THE CHAIR: We would typically be meeting 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. anyway, so the room is saved for the Veterans Affairs Committee on that day. It's a matter of aligning it from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. to match so MLAs are in a better pattern and rhythm.

Is there any other discussion on the motion?

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The committee, as I mentioned already, does not meet during the Summer months, July and August, or during House sittings. Does the committee wish to continue with this practice? Any discussion on that? Moving on.

The witness questioning procedure: Questioning of the witnesses is held in two rounds, typically. The first round is separated into 20 minutes for each party. The second round is calculated based on the time remaining in the meeting, often amounting to seven or nine minutes per party.

The order of questioning in the past has been the Official Opposition, third party and governing party. Does the committee wish to continue this practice? Is there any discussion on this topic?

MLA Palmer.

CHRIS PALMER: I would like to move a motion that the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs adopt a question format of 30 minutes for the government caucus, 20 minutes for the Official Opposition, and 10 minutes for the third party. Additional time will then be split evenly with half going to the government caucus and the other half shared by the two Opposition caucuses.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion on the motion?

MLA Hansen.

SUZY HANSEN: I want some clarification on the time for the other two caucuses. Can you please clarify that and what that means for the second round of questioning?

CHRIS PALMER: For the second round of questioning - that was your question? The second round of questioning would be whatever time is left. The government caucus would receive 50 per cent of the time and then the other 50 per cent split between the Opposition parties - however they feel.

SUZY HANSEN: I'm actually disappointed to see this change put forward once again. Folks in this room may already know how I feel based on previous committees.

Transparency and accountability are weakened whenever limitations are placed on the amount of time that members of the Opposition have to speak and ask questions. As we've heard from previous committees, it's about a feel-good moment and hearing from folks about all the amazing work that's happening, but the work that we're supposed to do is actually to figure out how we can help. How are we supposed to do that if we can't ask robust questions within an allotted time that's relevant for each of us?

Committees are an opportunity for all of us to work together to make sure that we can improve things for all Nova Scotians. We should not be playing politics by saying that one party deserves more time than the other. I've said that in another committee before. If we want to talk about fairness, fairness goes all the way around, meaning consistent and equal time.

I don't agree with this particular motion that's being put forward, and I will not agree with it until it is actually fair and robust for all of us to have the same amount of questioning.

THE CHAIR: Is there any other discussion?

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you?

The motion is carried.

When considering the agenda-setting, caucuses . . .

MLA Hansen.

SUZY HANSEN: Chair, I'd like to move a motion that the time allotted for the Opposition parties during the second round of questioning be split evenly between both the NDP caucus and the Liberal caucus and once that time has been calculated.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion on MLA Hansen's motion?

MLA Palmer.

CHRIS PALMER: I would just like to say that our side of the table has no problem with that whatsoever.

THE CHAIR: Any other discussion?

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

When considering agenda-setting, caucuses present a list of potential topics and corresponding witnesses for deliberation. As it stands, the governing party is allowed three topics, the Official Opposition is allowed two topics, and the third party is allowed one throughout the committee year.

The preferred order of selected topics throughout the year is: governing party, Official Opposition, governing party, third party, governing party and Official Opposition.

The clerk has been given flexibility with this schedule due to witnesses' availability. Suggested topics are sent to the clerk for compilation and distributed two weeks before each meeting. It has also been the practice of this committee to have requests to appear considered by each caucus separately for inclusion in their suggested topics list, should they choose to. Does the committee wish to make any changes to this part of the agenda-setting procedure? Okay, we will keep that as it is.

Next up is presentations and requested documents. The committee does not post witness presentations and requested information. Should the committee wish to upload such documents, it must come with approval of their publication to the Legislature's website with the help of the Legislative Library. Does the committee wish to include this practice?

Is there any discussion on this part of the agenda-setting? Okay.

Meeting documents and correspondence: Notices of meetings are often accompanied by the Legislative Library's research package, as described in the provided pamphlets, and sent to members, witnesses, legislative staff, and caucuses a week in advance of the meeting via an appointment email. Supporting documents such as the agenda, membership list, seating plan, and committee correspondence are sent to members, witnesses, and caucuses the day before the meeting. Please note that any correspondence directed at the committee, such as witness submissions, requests to appear, letters, or emails, is distributed to the members as it is received.

Does the committee wish to make any changes to this part of the agenda-setting? Okay.

Agenda-setting: Members must state their topic suggestions as one motion. Once stated, I will ask if there's any discussion, and then we will vote on the topic. It's witnesses that have been provided by each caucus. I will begin this part of the agenda-setting by looking to the PC Party for someone to make a motion.

MLA Stoilov.

DAMIAN STOILOV: I move that the first topic for the PC caucus be Veteran Entrepreneurship with the following witnesses: representatives from the Canadian legacy organizations.

I would also like to move that the second topic for the PC caucus be an update on Veterans Affairs Canada programs and supports in Nova Scotia with the following witness: Moussa Dramé, area director for Nova Scotia.

I would also like to move that the third topic for the PC caucus be Commissionaires Nova Scotia: An Overview of the Organization, with the following witnesses: representatives from Commissionaires Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion on the motions?

MLA Hansen.

SUZY HANSEN: I just have a question about the notes in the corner there with Veteran Entrepreneurship. The organization has already informed the committee that they do not wish to appear. Is that something we need to be concerned about?

THE CHAIR: I did ask for clarity from the clerk this morning on this. Originally, we had the Prince's Trust Canada and alumni from their veterans and military apprenticeships. They weren't able to appear, so we have found another witness organization that can appear under that same topic.

Is there any further discussion on the motion?

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Moving now to the NDP to put forward their topic suggestions.

MLA Hansen.

SUZY HANSEN: We would like to put forward our topics: Veteran Homelessness Support, and our witnesses will be the local representative for Veterans Affairs Canada, the local rep from Veterans Emergency Transition Services, the local rep from Landing Strong Cooperative, and the representative from Department of Opportunities and Social Development.

Then our second topic would be Veterans Survivor Pension Benefits, and we would like to see representatives from the Royal Canadian Legion Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command, a representative from the National Council of Veteran Associations, and a representative from the Armed Forces Pensioners and Annuitants Association of Canada.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion on the topics put forward by the NDP caucus?

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Now moving on to the Liberal caucus, with MLA Rankin.

[10:15 a.m.]

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I think since one of the topics has already been chosen by the NDP, there's just one remaining topic on our list: the Desmond Fatality Inquiry Final Report and Recommendations, with the deputy minister and other reps from the Department of Justice and representatives from the Office of Military Relations.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion on the topic?

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

There is another item on our agenda, which is that the Legislative Library would like to appear briefly before the committee to discuss its role in committee meeting preparation at a future meeting. A pamphlet containing an overview of its work has been distributed to the members.

At this point, I'll add a little more context to it. I did check with the clerk on this. They have appeared before the Community Services Committee, and it was very brief. It would be limited to two to five minutes, and we would leave time at the end after our witnesses have a chance to have a proper committee discussion.

I'm just wondering if there's any discussion on having this happen at the Veterans Affairs Committee.

MLA Palmer.

CHRIS PALMER: I think that's a great idea. I think there's general agreement that we could have that happen, for sure.

THE CHAIR: Okay, we will leave that in the clerk's capable hands to arrange at an upcoming Veterans Affairs meeting.

Having gone through the agenda, are there any other topics that anyone else wanted to bring forward?

Seeing none, that leaves us to say that our next meeting will be scheduled for May 20, 2025, at our new time of 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. Topics and witnesses will be determined after the clerk has had a chance to reach out to witnesses and schedule their availability.

If there is no other discussion, the meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:17 a.m.]