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C o n t e n t s	What is VeteranVoice.info?
	Exercising Your Democratic Rights
	How you can help!
	Recommended Links
	 www.VeteranVoice.info

Veteran Voice.info

VVi is for you, all veterans, regardless of whether you belong to a veteran organization or not. VVi is a distribution centre, a conduit for making sure that the information you need as a veteran is there for you in a timely fashion. Our aim is to provide a forum for *all* Canadian veterans, serving members and their families to have access to information pertaining to veteran rights.

VVi is an independent site, not associated with any governmental department, agency or veteran organization. VeteranVoice.info is maintained by independent contributions.



Exercising Your Democratic Rights

By Perry Grey

“The medium is the message” Marshall McLuhan

We are now into the second half of the longest election campaign in recent Canadian history. As usual all the parties are discussing their future plans and what they will deliver if elected. There is one serious problem with most of their statements, most are not realised after the election.

We have to understand that candidates use words that must be thoroughly understood by voters. Sober reflection and analysis is required, and this can be a challenge because many words have multiple definitions.

Take for example the word commitment. For many it means “an agreement or pledge to do something in the future”, but for a politician it can mean “an act of referring a matter to a legislative committee”. Compare these two definitions and you

can see how different they are. This a good example of how words can be manipulated to change the intent of the person using the words. George Orwell explored this process in his novel 1984. Orwell used the term “newspeak” which has been described as follows:

“a controlled language created by the totalitarian state Oceania as a tool to limit freedom of thought, and concepts that pose a threat to the regime such as freedom, self-expression, individuality, and peace.”

The word that describes this tendency is obfuscate (render obscure, unclear, or unintelligible). Those hearing or reading the words can often be bewildered or confused.

The Canadian military relies upon a single dictionary and the use of the first or primary definition of a word in an effort to clarify the use of words. This is not a universal practice and even in the military it is not always followed. We tend to use words that we understand or with which we are most familiar. This includes slang, patois and vernacular. Our language, regardless of whether it is English, French or any other, is constantly evolving. New words and definitions are regularly being added to dictionaries. The Global Language Monitor (<http://www.languagemonitor.com>) calculated that there were more than one million words in English by 2009; however, only about 10% are commonly used.

Language proficiency varies from language to language. A simple language may require a few hundred words, while a complex language requires thousands. To be fluent in English, for example, a person requires more than 20,000 words. That is still only 20% of the common words (20,000 of 100,000) and less than .00002% of the entire vocabulary!

Given the number of Canadian voters for whom English and French are not their mother tongues or even their normal languages, it means that many Canadians may be confused by the words used by political candidates.

Often it is important to understand the text, subtext and context of words. That means understanding which definition of each word is being used, the relationships between the words and the information being communicated. Complex communication increases the obfuscation immensely. This means that a person can even be altering the meaning of their words by the use of irony or sarcasm. Thus the person actually means the complete opposite of normal definitions of the words.

Going back to the definition of commitment. These are good examples of how words can be manipulated. A willingness to discuss issues in a legislative committee is not a guarantee to actually doing something.

For example, when the NVC was first introduced by a Liberal government, there was an understanding that it was “living legislation”. The reality is that there have been very few significant changes made since 2005, when Parliament unanimously voted in favour of it.

More recently, Erin O’Toole has referred to it as just the “veterans charter”. In my opinion, this is a major error because that simple three letter word is very important. By dropping the adjective, he is ignoring the fact that there is more than one “veterans charter”. The “old” or “original” charter became legislation in 1944.

Veteran Voice has long held that the NVC is vastly inferior to the first or old Veterans Charter (OVC), and that this discrepancy is not being properly rectified because the federal government has not made significant changes to the NVC. In fact, we believe that the differences between the OVC and the NVC demonstrate that Veterans have been disenfranchised by recent governments, namely the Liberal Government which introduced the NVC and the Conservative Government which has failed to ensure that it is “living legislation”.

The failures of the two ruling parties pre-date the introduction of the NVC, as discussed in previous articles. Federal governments have failed the Veterans Community by allowing the OVC to be weakened by policy changes implemented by VAC. Such changes began almost immediately after the OVC became legislation.

If Canadians examine just these two pieces of legislation, then they can understand the difference between federal government commitments. In fact, any political commitment or legislation should have a warning attached as follows:

“Subject to change without notice”

Now some may accuse me of being too cynical about politics, and this may be true some of the time. I would argue that it is not true all of the time. There are just too many examples of the failure of politicians to abide by their commitments. One of the most recent examples is the use of transparency and accountability by the federal government. Both words are examples of *newspeak* in my opinion.

Please note that the term federal government is used rather than Conservative or Liberal government. This is deliberate because the same words are often used by politicians regardless of their party membership.

The quote below the title of this article highlights the challenges, which Canadians will face as they decide how to vote on 19 October. Marshall McLuhan was a Canadian philosopher who researched communications and the cultural use of media. He believed that media was often more important than the information contained within the media. This is why it is important to understand the context and subtext in a message. Some of the information may be subliminal because of the tone or images associated with the information.

A good example of McLuhan's theory is the political poll. Today, we are bombarded by polls, particularly during elections. Pollsters have been able to develop this tool such that the results can be misleading. There are a number of important factors including how the questions are presented, the organisation doing the survey (and by extension its clients), and the honesty of those being surveyed. It is only obvious after an election whether the polls were accurate or inaccurate. At which point, some pollsters provide a report of why or why not their polls were good or bad.

In my opinion, a responsible voter needs to be objective. This involves analysing the information being presented by candidates and comparing it to history, specifically what a political party has done in the past. All parties have done good things and bad things. Deciding what is important to you the voter will influence how you vote. Your own preferences are also important.

One of the biggest problems in my opinion is that voters must decide whether they are voting for the party or its representative. Increasingly, elections are more about the party leader rather than the local candidate. This is discussed in a paper written for the Library of Parliament:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/LOP/researchpublications/prb0204-e.htm>

It begins with:

"Many Canadians, including Members of Parliament, believe that central roles of Members of Parliament have been eroded over the years, and that their rehabilitation is the appropriate objective of parliamentary reform."

Every politician has to make choices. These are often influenced by the interests of the people in their riding, special interest groups, their party and their own beliefs. We often hear about "party whips", who ensure that MP's vote with their party. Failure to support the party can result in being removed from caucus or being expelled from the party.

If MP's are normally required to vote with their party, then it reduces their options and they can not express freedom of choice. To a cynical voter (me), this reduces the MP to a mindless drone. What is the point of having hundreds of MP's if they all must vote as ordered by their party? Why not just have everyone vote for the party leader much like Americans voting for their presidents?

Some may argue that MP's, particularly ministers and parliamentary secretaries, are responsible for more than just voting in the House of Commons. This is true; however, this work is influenced by party doctrine and the advice provided by the public service (unelected officials).

Draft legislation can consist of hundreds of pages including many diverse topics, particularly omnibus bills (which more than just mix apples and oranges as they mix rocks, vegetables, etc.). Most of the writing is done by the public service and many politicians limit their study to a synopsis of the legislation or just accept their party's stance. Being a responsible politician involves a lot of reading and listening, unfortunately the trend in just supporting the party results in a reduction in reading and listening. Thus politicians can be lazy, and if you do not believe this, then study the performance of MP's in terms of attendance, participation in committees and related activities.

In 2014, the House of Commons was in session for 127 days (or 69% of the work year). The average voter worked 213 days. Most employers do not recognise any days "working at home" unless this can be monitored, and yet MP's can claim 31% as "working at home" (if one accepts that the 86 days outside of Parliament were in fact work days).

Again the NVC is a good example of a political failure. VAC wrote the draft legislation, and it was not subjected to the normal review process by political committees. Politicians were encouraged to support the NVC or be branded as anti-Veteran during a period of remembrance (celebration of VE Day in 2005). The NVC was accepted with almost no political scrutiny and become law very, very quickly. By comparison, the OVC evolved over several years and the Canadian government was determined to be more generous to Veterans of WW2 than it was to Veterans of WW1.

One problem with many elections is that voters can be as lazy as their politicians. This is obvious by the number of voters who do not vote. Voter apathy has increased in my life time and in the most recent elections it has been among the highest in federal elections:

2008 - 58.8% (lowest in history since 1867)

2011 - 61.4% (third lowest since 1867)

FYI, a good turnout is 70% or higher.

Voter apathy has encouraged some politicians to support compulsory voting, but this does not guarantee increased voting. Sometimes, it results in spoiled votes or voting for the candidate least likely to win. Having to rank candidates (donkey voting) is used in Australia and other countries, but it does not mean that voters are less apathetic.

In an effort to determine how to vote, I took the vote selector survey on <https://votecompass.cbc.ca>. There are several other surveys, which are available including <https://canada.isidewith.com>. The result surprised me because it was not what I expected. This made me re-evaluate my options.

Normally, I consider what is important to me based on what each party includes in its campaign platform and the political issues that are most important to me, specifically Veterans issues. I rarely learn about the local candidates because they seldom share many of their personal views and because much of their propaganda repeats the propaganda supported by their party leader.

It would be nice if politicians could exercise more freedom of choice rather than being motivated by fear, guilt or cultural influences (gender, economic, spiritual, racial, ethical and other factors).

This is why I support the privacy of voting in an election and also why I do not participate in political polls. My vote is nobody's business but my own.

Being Canadian means that we have the freedom to chose when voting. We may not be happy with the outcome of an election, but we can take pride in being responsible voters by exercising our democratic rights. We do encourage everyone to vote and more importantly be interested in voting objectively.

As Veterans, we showed our willingness to defend our way of life even if it meant sacrificing our own. To then not participate in that life seems wasteful somehow.

The future of our country is far too important to be left to politicians.

Perry Gray is a Regular Force veteran, serving as both Publisher and Chief Editor of VVi. Perry has been with VVi for 12 years.



You Can Help!

All veterans are encouraged to pass information, opinions, links to self-help sites onto VVi. VeteranVoice.info is a distribution centre and we are dependant on others to pass information. This is your site. Tell other veterans about your site.

Email: info@VeteranVoice.info

Facebook Messenger: <https://www.facebook.com/VeteranVoice.info>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/VetVoiceinfo>



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VeteranVoice.info (VVi)

<http://VeteranVoice.info>



VVi Bulletin Board

<http://VeteranVoice.info/bulletinboard.htm>



VVi Database

http://www.veteranvoice.info/db/all_records.asp



VVi CSAT Forum

<http://csat.top-talk.net/>



VVi on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/VeteranVoice.info>



VVi on Twitter

<https://twitter.com/VetVoiceinfo>



Veteran's Aide Memoire

http://veteranvoice.info/archive/aide_memoire/Vet_Aide_Memoire.pdf

National (US) Gulf War Resources Center, Inc.

<http://www.ngwrc.org/>



**PPCLI Association
Volunteer Patricia Program (VPP)**

<http://vpp.ppcliassoc.ca>



**LEAVE NO VET BEHIND
SISIP
Clawback**

<http://leavenovetbehind.ca/home>



<http://seanbruyea.com>



<https://www.cfpsa.com/Splashpages/SoldierOn/>



**Veterans Affairs
Canada**

**Anciens Combattants
Canada**

<http://www.veterans.gc.ca/>

**V.E.T.S
Veterans Emergency
Transition Services**

<http://www.vetscanada.org/>



**Veterans
Ombudsman**

**Ombudsman
des vétérans**

<http://www.ombudsman-veterans.gc.ca/>



Veterans of Canada.ca
A Community for Canadian Heroes

<http://veteransofcanada.ca/>



Wounded Warriors Fund

<http://www.woundedwarriors.ca/>