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Feature: Part 2 - My Name is Not Chicken Little...BUT

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Part 2 - My Name is Not Chicken Little...BUT

Periodical Issue 201669 Part 1 - Promises and Expectations

Veterans disappointed with lack of delivery on Liberal campaign promises

Kent Hehr, Liberals Not Living Up To Promises To Veterans: Lawyer

'Veterans want to be with veterans,' say new generation of vets shut out of wings devoted to their care

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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.

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My Name is Not Chicken Little...BUT

Perry Grey
Chief Editor VeteranVoice.info (VVi)

“As long as justice and injustice have not terminated their ever-renewing fight for ascendancy in the affairs of mankind, human beings must be willing, when need is, to do battle for the one against the other.” John Stuart Mill

VAC asked for the stakeholders planning to attend the next summit 5-6 October to provide items for the agenda. This is part two of my input. It is addressed to Kent Hehr and Walt Natynczyk because they are the two men who should be providing a much better standard of service to the Veterans Community.

The title of the article is taken from an old children's story, it is appropriate because I am not alone in my disappointment with the initial efforts of the new Liberal government (see articles at the end of my editorial). As anyone familiar with Veteran Voice knows, I openly criticised Kent Hehr and VAC during the last stakeholders summit, and I still believe that Kent is a bad minister and that VAC is shirking many of its responsibilities.

I am not alone.

Other veterans:

“The disturbing aspect of all of this our MVA is actually proud and bragging on his Facebook about the way in which his answering questions, asked to him.

We are getting nowhere with him and it's got to the point where he is Ignoring Veterans suggestions or request by Veterans.

He himself thinks his doing an outstanding job and continues to say that there will always be a few Veterans who are not happy with what's transpiring.

The fact of the matter is that the number of unsatisfied Veterans today is huge, even some advocates who stood beside him are changing their views.

Civilians are not happy, the media are not getting their questions answered.

He dug himself into a hole and continues to dig himself deeper.

The media needs to keep the pressure on to show the public what is really going on.

It's time for JT to step in and replace him, even that might not solve the problem, we need someone with leadership qualities who can stand up against those bureaucrats.

Someone who is willing to truly listen to Veterans and pass legislation that reflects fairness for all Veterans.

Again, boycott the MVA, focus mainly on protest, the media and the courts to look after our well being, talking to him is a complete waste of time.”

The Liberal Party gave the impression that it was very interested in the Veterans Community during the 2015 election. The reality is that it has breached a common principle that Kent Hehr should understand as a lawyer; the new government gives with one hand while taking with the other hand (derogation from grant). While this is usually limited to property issues between landlords and tenants, it has been cited in other legal cases. I believe that it can be used in the Equitas class action case (discussed in part one), and by extension other issues involving the government and the Veterans Community.

Kent and Walt continue to state that VAC will fulfil all of the election commitments, and they sound like broken records when on the defensive in interviews. The contrast between VAC commitments and their decision to resume the legal battle just highlights the limited support that the Veterans Community can really expect. It is a similar situation to that of the relationship between the former Conservative Government and Veterans – basically say one thing and then do something different.

By the way, Walt was appointed by the former government to improve the relationship with the Veterans Community.

The reality seems to be that the re-opening of VAC offices is the main effort, but even this is a long drawn out process.

VAC may not re-open all of the shuttered offices, but will study options. This may seem like a good idea to the bureaucrats, but does not make life easier for Veterans. It is still frustrating for many Veterans to receive support from VAC through existing channels. Thus more effort has to be made to improve the service delivery.

VAC published a news release on 15 April announcing the formation of six advisory groups to “improve transparency and engage Veterans”. Kent and Walt did not discuss these groups at the May summit. It would have been nice to know about their terms and who was appointed. Since then the groups have met behind closed doors and have not shared any of their discussions with the Veterans Community. How does this improve transparency?

One group member, who was very critical of the activities, was openly criticised by another:

“Unfortunately, it has now become abundantly clear that one dissenting member of the MVAC's Policy Committee is dead set against the otherwise unanimously recommended

proposals of the majority. This individual is currently ignoring the committee's non-disclosure agreement to cast single-sided aspersions against the work of the committee and even the motivations of its volunteer members. This is all extremely distasteful and unfortunate, but I for one will not stand for a rogue individual compromising the incredibly important work of the all-volunteer Policy Committee simply because he self-styles himself as some sort of "singular saviour of the veteran cause".

I applaud the target of this spiteful commentary for speaking out about the group. If the group is supposedly honouring transparency (and in addition accountability), then it should not operate in secret. The writer of the comments does not understand that the only restriction placed on the groups was to not share personal information presented by group members. We all tend to use personal information to highlight our experiences with VAC and this information should not become gossip outside of any meetings.

If the groups do not discuss their activities with the Veterans Community, then there is the serious risk that rumour will fill the vacuum.

One such rumour is that the groups were stacked with pro-VAC members and ignorant specialists. The latter is defined as a person who was appointed because of their knowledge and experience, but have either had minimal contact with the Veterans Community or are not Veterans. With over 700,000 members of the Veterans Community, VAC should not have to recruit outsiders.

Another rumour relates to the ugly practice of governments creating groups so that they can give the appearance of consulting. This is very believable based on the history of past VAC advisory groups, most of which were ignored. If the current groups spent time researching the activities of their predecessors, then they would discover that there have been lots of recommendations submitted to VAC, which were ignored, specifically over 500 suggestions to improve the New Veterans Charter.

For example, the Special Needs Advisory Group (SNAG) published five reports and these are available from VAC (and other sources including this website). Having read the reports, I can say that they were very useful to Veteran Voice and other Veterans organisation, and I recommend them to the new advisory groups (if only for the advice on what the new groups should discuss and how to structure themselves). There is lots of good information if you take the time to read several hundred pages. I can not report on what VAC did with those five reports beyond sharing them.

VAC has published the names of group members; however, there are some disturbing points to note. Several members serve on two groups, and there are many organisations which are not included. It will be argued, no doubt, by VAC that it tried to be fair...but again with so many members of the Veterans Community, why be repetitive?

Will Kent and Walt ensure that the chairs of each advisory group report to the

stakeholders at the next summit? Will VAC publish interim reports so that the Veterans Community can follow what is being discussed? Will VAC publish the terms of reference and period of service (how many months does a member serve)? Will VAC allow Canadians to submit suggestions to the groups?

“well buds kind of unhappy with some of the vets orgs. different agendas and what not. Orgs refusing open and honest debates over specific subjects like full financial disclosure and so forth. their has to be a better way.”

“(we) are frustrated that the meetings we've had where we spent the whole time arguing and rearguing and rearguing the need for the program..... At this point the position from the MH senior staff at VAC is we will have until August 2017 to design something to be considered for the 2018 budget. Currently we have already used up all our allotted meetings we are allowed to have this year with these debates...”

Prior to the last summit in May, VAC published the following:

The amendments to the Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Regulations will:

1. change the disability award, the critical injury benefit, the death benefit and the detention benefit indexation method so that it is based on the percentage change to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the year ending on October 31 of the previous year;
2. allow disability award and death benefit recipients receiving a retrospective payment resulting from the increase to the disability award and/or death benefit to be reimbursed for financial advice fees;
3. allow VAC to collect information to determine eligibility for a retrospective payment resulting from the increase to the disability award and death benefit;
4. remove references to “class” and replace them with “rate of award,” as the term class will no longer be used in Schedule 3 of the CFMVRC Act;
5. clarify that the potential impact of a permanent and severe impairment on earning capacity and career advancement opportunities will be considered when determining the permanent impairment allowance grade level;
6. change the name “permanent impairment allowance” to “career impact allowance” and the designation “totally and permanently incapacitated” to “diminished earning capacity” to better reflect the intent of the benefit;
7. include the existing definition of “suitable gainful employment” in a new subsection 6(2), as this term is only used in the definition of “diminished earning capacity”;
8. change the minimum salary used in determining earnings loss benefit from “basic

corporal” to “senior private” (sections 18–20);

9. ensure that no earnings loss benefit recipient receives a lower earnings loss benefit amount as a result of these changes, while they participate in a rehabilitation plan or vocational assistance plan and have employment earnings, by allowing for the use of the greater of the monthly imputed income prior to October 1, 2016, and the monthly imputed income on implementation of the regulatory amendments in the calculation of employment earnings off-sets; and

10. remove the 2% indexation cap for the indexation of the monthly military salary and the earnings loss benefit payment.

Much of this can be defined as window dressing and it must be reviewed carefully to separate the positive and negative points. The window dressing is particularly obvious in the meaningless changes in terminology. This is the hallmark of bureaucracy, which wants to give the appearance of doing something, while in reality not doing much. This is also known as arranging the deck chairs as the Titanic sinks!

For example, does anyone really care about what VAC calls its programs, benefits and services? It just means that anyone interested has to keep learning new terms. This is quite Orwellian for anyone who has read 1984. PIA is now CIA, but it should not be confused with the US intelligence agency. As many Veterans, who receive PIA, are no longer employed and therefore do not have a career, it is a figurative slap in the face to be paid “career impact allowance”. Currently to qualify for PIA/CIA, a veteran must be severely disabled which usually limits their employability. VAC rarely approves more than the minimum allowance even though there are three grades. It would be better to have spent the time reviewing the expansion of this benefit rather than re-naming it.

What is meant by “suitable gainful employment” and is it relevant to anything?

One of the greatest challenges facing any Veteran is translating military skills and experience such that potential civilian employers understand what the Veteran can do. Often the Veteran has to settle for any employer just to keep paying the bills. Despite what the former minister, Erin O’Toole, said in the article below, Canada did offer the equivalent of the American G.I. Bill in the old charter which benefited many Veterans after World War Two.

It would be nice to know what Kent and Walt have to say about the low hiring rate of the federal government (Veterans Hiring Act), and why VAC is not setting the example by hiring Veterans. VAC still has hundreds of positions to fill, but it is not actively recruiting Veterans or even considering providing the education for Veterans who may be interested in being hired (note many positions require university degrees).

“why does a VAC case manager have to have a degree in the study, understanding, or assessment of human behaviour (the degree program must have also included the

completion of a practicum or field placement for graduation)? Would not the experience and skills of many NCM's and officers be sufficient to fulfil personnel management tasks? As these satisfy the alternate option of equivalent combination of education and experience ! ”

During the discussions at the last summit of the “break-out groups”, the members of my group discussed many of the poor word choices currently used by VAC. One recommendation was to replace “dependant” as the word suggested an inferior status.

My group discussed two questions:

Can you clarify what reasonable “economic security” means to you in the context of VAC benefits and services; and

If you could give the minister one piece of specific advice about how to uphold the “one Veteran, one standard” what would it be.

We preferred to discuss the term “reasonable economic security” because the first word means different things depending on who is answering the question. This is illustrated in the following comments on VAC financial support. Generally, there is much consensus that VAC does not provide or ensure that its clients have “reasonable economic security”, which is why VAC knows that “one of the biggest criticisms from stakeholders has been that VAC financial benefits do not provide a reasonable level of economic security”.

The Earnings Loss Benefit is a good example of the failure to provide “reasonable economic security”. VAC plans to increase it from 75% to 90% of gross pre-release income; however, the minimum level will be reduced from basic corporal to a senior private's pay. Using the current CF pay scale, this is the difference:

$\$4714 \times 75\% = \3535.50

$\$4120 \times 90\% = \3708.00

This is a whopping increase of \$172.50. Hardly a significant gain for Veterans and it remains a taxable benefit. It is in reality less than 5% increase from the old ELB.

“Improving the Earnings Loss Benefit for Part-time Reservists (OVO 2013 report)

The Earnings Loss Benefit provided to medically released part-time Reserve Force Veterans is based on 75 percent of a deemed salary (one standard amount) of \$2,700 per month, while the benefit for full-time Reserve Force or Regular Force Veterans is based on 75 percent of their actual pre-release salary or a minimum salary of Corporal basic

- gross injustice

This equates to an annual income support, before applicable offsets are deducted, of \$24,300 for the part-time Reserve Force Veteran, regardless of rank, compared to a minimum annual income support of \$41,600 for the full-time Veteran at the Corporal

basic salary level.

- minimum compared to std

The difference between the two income support levels increases at higher rank and salary levels.”

...with VAC announcing they are going to top all the ELB up to 90% and the CDS deciding SISIP does not have the funds so we won't be going to 90%. This means every soldier on SISIP with a Service Related injury or illness now has to apply to VAC, get approved and then apply to their Rehab program so VAC can start to do the additional top up to 90%. Of course this saves the government a ton of money because VAC will only pay from the time of approval so the announced 1 Oct date will get the existing VAC clients but the rest will be penalized while the processing is being done. Furthermore, VAC has enhanced the existence of an other class of Veteran, those who were not injured on duty, by now paying them less. So much for the one Veteran one Standard approach."

With the other changes made to the financial support provided by VAC, is it reasonable to expect a Veteran to survive on ELB?

The average Canadian family earns about \$77,000, and taxes (42%) and living expenses - housing, food and clothing – (37%) account for most of it. Many Veterans have special needs, which will account for the remaining 21%. Unfortunately, our Veterans receiving a senior private's ELB do not earn \$77,000 and if the Veteran's spouse can not work because caring for the Veteran (and the family) is full time work, then the family truly is "dependent" on VAC.

Kent and Walt need to spend more time improving VAC financial support so ALL Veterans have "reasonable economic security". It is easy for them to have "reasonable economic security" since they earn a lot more than the average Canadian.

As for the second question, VAC has yet to develop one standard for its benefits and services. There are currently five types of clients according to the VAC website:

- * CF;
- * War Service;
- * Allied Services;
- * RCMP; and
- * family members.

There are even more sub-categories depending what VAC is willing to provide as clients may or may not be eligible programs of the old charter, new charter or even both charters. One of the biggest criticisms of VAC is the disparity in services as the Veterans Community continually point out the differences between the old and new charters.

One Veteran one Standard became history in 2006. Now we are faced with a messy situation that continues to grow, a situation that has yet to be properly understood and addressed in a united fashion. The government has the upper hand and will continue to have the upper hand until such time Veterans are united in understanding the need to shift focus, and change tactics.

There can only be one standard when VAC produces a single charter that applies equally to ALL Veterans.

Another major issue is health care, which is required by many Veterans; however, VAC has decided to make this a provincial responsibility. The result is that Veterans increasingly have to compete with other Canadians, regardless of federal agreements with the provinces. By comparison, there are currently 152 VA medical centres and approximately 1400 community-based outpatient clinics in the US.

It is very sad to read that “more than two-thirds of the 6,640 people that VAC supports are in community beds in nursing homes across Canada rather than the remaining 15 provincially operated facilities with Veterans’ wings”.

“I don’t know why he (Kent) says he doesn’t have the legislative authority to get a veteran in if he wanted to since VAC seem to control eligibility, waiting lists, payment etc.....I would say if anyone has their hands tied it would be the provincial health minister for those contract beds.”

“Hehr was speaking in semantics. He said that he wanted to be very clear, and that “VAC does not own any hospitals!”. That is very accurate. But there is a very distinct difference between owning a facility, and being responsible for determining who is eligible for a bed, in one of these facilities. And the VMB is NOT a hospital, and neither are any of the other places that they have Veterans long term care beds. They are long term care facilities, or seniors homes. After all, the provincial governments are not going to have access to a person's military records, to make that determination.”

Kent and Walt, you need to consider the following, good leaders should:

“know in great detail what he or she passes down to the bureaucrats to work on for implementation;
not be afraid to send things back to the bureaucrats for further work; and
focus on what is the priority for Veterans that Veterans themselves want and not allow the bureaucrats to take it upon themselves to set priorities.”

Every Stakeholder agenda should include an update on the outstanding commitments that the Liberal Party included in the last election campaign. VAC must explain when each one will be achieved or explain why there are delays. Information must be released in a timely manner to ensure that VAC is doing its utmost to “deliver a higher standard of

service and care” as stated in the mandate letter written by the Prime Minister.

Being the minister is not about posing with Veterans and giving speeches about remembrance. As one Veteran wrote:

“(Kent) is in photo OP heaven, to the average Canadian he shines in his duties as Minister. We here on CSAT are more informed about the interpretation OR understanding of what's going on here. The offices and the Commendations are an attempt to show Canadians that he is right on top of things, also keeps his boss happy. He is playing the card of photo OPS and cross Country travel which fools a lot of people. Some Veterans want the offices re opened, some see the Commendations as a sign of respect and appreciation, while others have much different priorities such as seeing him engaged directly with the implementations and reporting progress of the workings of the implementations. Like I said before, that's the card his playing, that's his style and there's nothing I see so far that will convince me that he won't continue down that path.”

Kent has to stop giving the “speech” about the \$5.6 billion and the 15 commitments. It only works with ignorant people, and Veterans are not ignorant. They know about the deficiencies and the many broken promises to fix them. This is why Veterans complain to the media and on social media.

Money allocated is not the same as money spent, and only the government's annual public accounts detail how much money was ACTUALLY spent. Remember that the Conservative government failed to spend over one BILLION dollars during its terms in office.

“if you are looking for a good drinking game just watch one of Kent Hehr's interviews or question periods and have a drink every time he said "Mandate".....man oh man you will be plastered in no time!!!..”

“MVA's Facebook Comments

It's 5.6 billion over 6 years, that's less then a billion per year, drop the smoke and mirrors. You can't tally money up when your term is 4 years and say this is what we're doing! And since you just published that Canada owes a duty to the sacred obligation call the lawyer and drop the case

And that is why your government is taking the Veterans back to court saying in an appeal that you do not have a sacred obligation to the Veterans. And the meagre increase to the lump sum is laughable \$360,000 to replace a life long pension hahaha. The British pay out is just a bit over \$1 million and the severally injured get the regular pay tax free for life. You can not even think your doing a good job if you look at what the Brits and Aussies are doing for their Vets

And mere days ago, the government lawyers re-adopted the previous governments position regarding the sacred obligation to Canada's Veterans. That position being that there IS no sacred obligation. Now we chalk double-speak up alongside boldfaced lying on your record as MVA.

This announcement should have followed the announcement that you were dropping the Equitas lawsuit, or it's not worth the electricity wasted out of my cellphone battery to display it on my screen. Make us whole, or don't waste my time with false platitudes and cheap words.

Please enlighten me on how supportive respectful or compassionate the Equitas court case. The government is arguing that Canada has no sacred obligation to veterans. It can't both ways.

You lie like a rug, really nice how you and the liberal party cheated the veterans of this country with your lies, double talk, and continual repeating of the same statements. Hope that you can sleep at night knowing how you have screwed veterans out of their votes.”

“I am now, well beyond sick of the MVA, going round in circles and not answering the ? Why did his gov not end the court case? Time to rebel and get rid of this fat ass...”

“The liberals changed the PA to the NVC, the Conservatives kept the status quo and now the Liberals are still playing politics on our backs. Where are the other Veterans from the Liberal's on our issue?”

“I suppose its time for vets orgs and advocates to skip the whole call for the MVA to resign thing its soooo 2015 anyway and go straight to asking for the resignation of the prime minister himself.

NOW would be the perfect time for that . play their game by saying he promised to return (and this is important) THE PA PENSION and lied through his teeth. sooo we want him to resign. this relatively small sacrifice would undoubtedly improve the well being of many disabled vets and their families and save a few of those vets lives who have sacrificed so much more.

JT since even with the power of the PMO you cannot live up to your promises we are asking you to help us by stepping aside so maybe someone with the proper abilities can.

ya I know it aint goona happen. if all vets orgs start clamoring for this though it would make a great story for ANY reporter and really sine a huge lite on the subject”

As for Walt, he will lose the respect of Veterans if he does not provide better advice to VAC. Regardless of how many advisory groups VAC creates, Walt is the best adviser within the department. He has employed a variety of serving and retired Veterans to help improve VAC. He has to constantly prove that he is the right man for the job.

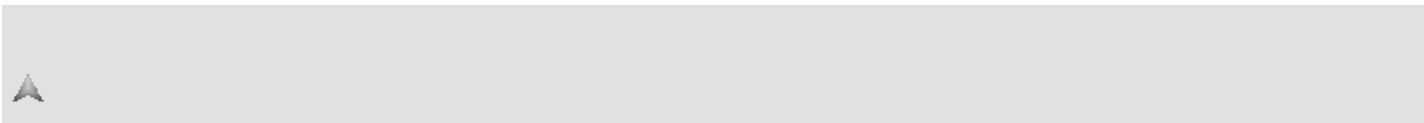
Personally, I think that his decisions to support the legal action against Equitas, and the

reduction of the ELB indicate that may be he is not the leader that Veterans need. He may strongly disagree with me; however, I would not advise any minister to take legal action against Veterans or accept inferior financial support, well below “reasonable economic security” for any Veteran. Both represent “unlawful commands” in my opinion. Walt could have spoken out if he disagreed. I have not found any evidence that he disagrees with either decision. Good military leaders take care of their personnel, bad ones do not.

“during the election campaign, the Prime Minister said that no veteran would have to fight their own government to get the support and compensation they deserve.”

So after more than ten months, why are Veterans still fighting the government?

Perry Gray is a Regular Force veteran, serving as the Chief Editor of VVi. Perry has been with VVi for 13 years.



Veterans disappointed with lack of delivery on Liberal campaign promises

GLORIA GALLOWAY

The Globe and Mail Monday, Jul. 25, 2016

Nine months after the Liberals came to power saying veterans would not have to fight the government for support and compensation, former soldiers say they are disappointed that so many commitments have yet to be fulfilled, including a promise of a free education for those who complete their service.

The failure of the government to quickly meet its promises on an education benefit, as well as on restoring the option of lifetime pensions to those with disabilities, are the two deepest disappointments for veterans, said Mike Blois, the former president of the Afghanistan Veterans Association of Canada.

“Betrayed is the way people feel,” he said. “Veterans who generally vote very conservatively, lots of them voted Liberal because they thought the Liberal Party was going to do something for veterans.”

When the party was campaigning to form the government last fall, it promised to “invest \$80-million every year to create a new veterans education benefit” that would cover the

full cost of up to four years of college, university or technical education for those who have completed their military service.

But the promise that the education benefit would be available “every year” apparently did not include fiscal year 2016-17, since it was not part of the March federal budget. That has been a disappointment for veterans and those who are helping them to find jobs.

Many veterans say a free education would be especially helpful for the young men and women who served in the infantry. Their primary job was combat-related and they did the most difficult and dangerous assignments in places such as Afghanistan, but they didn’t always emerge from the military with skills that translate to the private sector.

Mr. Blois was entitled to some educational assistance from the Veterans Affairs Department because a permanent brain injury forced his release from the service. But with a veterans education benefit, “I wouldn’t have gone into significant debt to go through law school,” he said.

The education benefit was to be modelled on the American G.I. Bill, which was introduced during the Second World War and currently provides any U.S. veteran with full tuition after three years of service, plus a monthly living allowance and a book stipend.

Sarah McMaster, a spokeswoman for Veterans Affairs Minister Kent Hehr, said in an e-mail that the government is intent upon paying for veterans’ education. “Understanding that some commitments will take more time than others, we are working hard to deliver on the remaining items – including the veterans education benefit,” she said.

Canada Company, a charity founded in 2006, helps veterans find employment in Canadian corporations – in large part by helping employers understand how the skills acquired in military service would be valuable to their work force.

Angela Mondou, its president, said she is excited by the fact that more than 360 veterans have obtained jobs since the start of 2016 with the help of her organization. But 6,000 veterans, reservists or serving members of the military remain registered on the group’s website because they need help to make the transition to life after serving with the Canadian Armed Forces.

“Somebody may spend nine years in the infantry, serving their country and going to operations around the world, and come out with a huge amount of team-leading experience, the ability to work in high-risk scenarios, project-management skills, you name it, but they don’t have the equivalent credentials in the business world,” said Ms.

Mondou, who did not direct any criticism toward the government. “So that’s where this [educational] support would be very welcome.”

Vince Fowler, a Calgary-based business coach who left the military with the rank of corporal in 1996, said the education benefit would have been an “excellent” tool for those who have been released from the Forces. Degrees, diplomas and technical training are the tickets many veterans need to get jobs that they consider meaningful, he said.

Help with educational expenses would mean veterans “can go get a ticket” to a new job, said Mr. Fowler, who is a guest speaker for Canada Company. “We gave up years of our lives, on purpose, for our country. ... Help us on the way out so we can be productive citizens.”

And \$80-million “is just pocket change to the government,” he said. “So just give it.”

Conservative MP Erin O’Toole, who was the veterans affairs minister in the previous government, said he does not agree that Canada should create the equivalent of the American G.I. Bill.

Soldiers, sailors and airmen and women who retire as a result of a service-related injury are already entitled to educational assistance, and not all able-bodied veterans need to have their full tuition paid for by the government, he said. The Conservatives would prefer that the limited resources in federal coffers be targeted to have as much of an impact as possible, he added.

But the veterans education benefit is a Liberal campaign promise that has gone unfulfilled, along with other promises to veterans, Mr. O’Toole said. “I think, sometimes, false hope is worse than nothing.”



Veterans Affairs is broken and the system needs to be fixed now.

By [Emily Mountney-Lessard](#), The Intelligencer Thursday, September 1, 2016

That’s the message that came across – loud and clear – from veterans and their spouses who attended a town hall style discussion hosted by Bay of Quinte MP Neil Ellis in Belleville Wednesday evening.

Ellis, who is also the chairman of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, hosted the discussion in order to gather information on how veterans can be better served by the government as part of a “Canada-wide fact finding mission.”

Attendees did not pose questions to the MP, instead a list of questions was provided to Ellis from the Minister of Veterans Affairs. Attendees were asked for feedback on those specific questions which touched on a variety of topics. The information, along with feedback from other similar town halls held across the country, will be compiled and sent to the minister.

Much of the discussion revolved around how the system is failing veterans by not allowing their spouses to help them get the help they need.

For Louise McFaul, navigating the Veterans Affairs system has been a nightmare. She told Ellis she cares for her husband, a medically retired member of the Canadian Forces. She feels Veterans Affairs should be more proactive in assisting spouses of veterans and advising them what services are available, instead of just leaving the spouse to navigate the system alone.

“I feel from my perspective, they could recognize my contributions as a caregiver of a medically retired member of the Canadian Forces, that they would be to provide me services before I need them. I’ve found, over the last decade, my difficulty that I’ve experienced comes from having to know what to ask for,” she said.

“I have to know the different options available to me, know who to ask, know how phrase it, what form to fill out, when to ask, when to phone, when to phone back, when you phone back again and who to write a letter to when no one returns my call.”

Yvonne Burke echoed those statements and said every spouse should be able to have their own Veterans Affairs Canada account. Her husband, Joseph, was also present. They both represented the Canadian Aboriginal Veterans and Serving Members Association.

“Veterans Affairs spends most of their time beating the veteran around the bush continuously, and the spouse has to put up with their denial, their disappointment and the sleepless nights,” she said.

One woman, whose military husband recently died, said navigating the system was complicated, hard to understand and the money is not reaching her as fast as it should be.

McFaul later told Ellis that Veterans Affairs needs to better serve the new generation of veterans — “the 30-year-olds with tiny children.”

“In a time of horrible crisis in my family, when I turned to Veterans Affairs and they could not provide help, they said ‘go to the Legion’. I went to my Legion and it’s run by volunteers, who have their hearts are in the right place,” she said. “What I needed wasn’t someone to mow my lawn, or do my laundry or clean my eaves troughs. I needed someone to watch my kids so I could go grocery shopping, so I could make it to one of my group therapy sessions, to do some self care.”

She said the country is facing a crisis with the number of young veterans committing suicide.

“I’m not discounting generations before me, I’m not discounting people who are retired but I’m saying you have a whole new batch of people to provide services to and Veterans Affairs, as it stands, does not have the tools to deal with it. It’s coming to a crisis and it has been coming to a crisis in the past years with the number of suicides.”

She said 70 per cent of the men her husband served with are dead by their own hand.

Attendees also called for the re-establishment of life-long pensions for injured veterans and to change the perspective surrounding medical marijuana – it should be treated like a pharmaceutical and those who use it for medical purposes shouldn’t be ostracized.

Veterans need access to medical marijuana in other forms, so they can consume it without the potentially harmful effects of smoking it.

Further, the culture of the Veterans Affairs system needs to be changed. Ellis admitted that sometimes “culture ruins strategy.”

The best way to change the culture of the system? Hire veterans or their spouses to work there.

Several suggestions were made about not taxing veteran's pensions and several people questioned why there were no staff or representatives at the town hall from the Trenton-based Veterans Affairs office.

“If they're of limited value down there, why in heaven's name are they there?” asked Wellington resident Ian Inrig.

When asked “what does service excellence mean to you?” the answer was clear: “Get rid of all the red tape people have to get through to get the services they require. Simple.”

There was little discussion of homeless veterans as that was not included in the list from the minister.

“There are seven or eight key areas that the minister is tackling right now,” said Skip Simpson, a veteran working for Ellis, specializing in veterans cases. “The feedback we’re getting out of Ottawa is that it’s not in the top eight or nine in this particular moment.”



Kent Hehr, Liberals Not Living Up To Promises To Veterans: Lawyer

The Canadian Press
Posted: 09/02/2016

CALGARY — The lawyer for Canadian veterans involved in a legal battle with the federal government says the Department of Veterans Affairs is playing politics with his clients.

Don Sorochan said Thursday that Minister Kent Hehr is not standing by his party's promise in the last election to re-establish lifelong pensions for veterans.

Hehr, who was in Calgary Thursday, said his government is moving forward as quickly as it can to do that.

The legal action was launched in B.C. Supreme Court in 2012 by six severely disabled veterans over changes made to their compensation six years earlier.

The federal government replaced lifelong pensions with lump-sum payments, upsetting veterans, who argued they deserved disability payments on par with workers' compensation.

Efforts by the federal government to have the case thrown out were dismissed, which led to an appeal.

The lawsuit was put on hold in 2015 while the parties agreed to wait and see whether new legislation and a federal election would allow for an out-of-court resolution.

Feds argue they don't owe 'extraordinary obligation'

The deadline for a decision passed in June, and the Liberal government filed documents in court in July saying the government does not owe an "extraordinary obligation" to modern-day veterans.

The Trudeau government's position in court was initially held by the former Conservative government before the Tories changed their stance in December 2014 after a public backlash.

Justice Harvey Groberman of British Columbia Appeal Court said the court will consider whether to take into account contradictions between the government's current legal position and the stand the Liberals took during the election.

A decision is expected this fall.

"We have to run government by good policy and yet I understand that those members who are engaged in that lawsuit have served this country bravely and boldly," Hehr said when asked about the state of the lawsuit.

"To a large extent, we have drafted much of our policy in the last election based on some of their concerns, so we're moving forward as quickly as we can."

Sorochan dismissed Hehr's response.

"Get real and get on with it rather than issuing carefully crafted statements that avoid saying that there's a legal obligation to them," he said.



'Veterans want to be with veterans,' say new generation of vets shut out of wings devoted to their care

By Ashley Burke, [CBC News](#) June 13, 2016

If there's one thing Alannah Gilmore, a retired sergeant, can't forget — it's that anything could happen at any moment.

As a former combat medic for the Canadian Forces, she cared for those wounded after suicide explosions in Afghanistan. Her husband lost both of his legs to a land mine during the same tour of duty. Gilmore had always hoped that if she ever needed long-term care, it would be at a facility dedicated to vets. But like roughly 600,000 veterans, she doesn't have that option.

"I'm highly disappointed," Gilmore said. "These hospitals exist. The programs do exist. Why are we taking away this as an option for families?"

As it stands now, only those who fought in the Second World War and the Korean War are eligible for long-term care homes dedicated to veterans, while anyone who served after the 1953 ceasefire in Korea is not.

More than

1,000 delegates 'Why are the newer generations of veterans not
from across deserving?' - Alannah Gilmore, retired combat medic
Canada will

discuss the issue at a Royal Canadian Legion convention in St. John's today.

Members are expected to vote on a resolution to push the federal government to open up access to 15 veterans facilities to all generations — before veterans wings become a thing of the past.

"It's an expiry date. Why are the newer generations of veterans not deserving?" Gilmore said. "The difference between having the veterans wings is it's full of veterans. It's being with like-minded people. Maybe you have a wing and half of them have PTSD. Who relates better to someone with PTSD is someone who has been in a similar circumstance."

If veterans wings disappear, all modern-day veterans — those who served in the Cold War, peacekeeping missions and in Afghanistan — will have to get in line with the general public on provincial wait lists for care. Veterans Affairs will cover the cost if a veteran's illness or injury is related to their service.

It was a decision made half a century ago that's to blame for excluding post-Korean War veterans from the same long-term care as those who came before them.

During the First World War, the federal government operated 44 hospitals across Canada to give treatment to injured soldiers. As universal and provincial health care services evolved, Veterans Affairs Canada said the need for treatment declined. The number of facilities open to veterans reduced and in 1955 there were 18 remaining.

Then in 1966, the Government of Canada decided to transfer all of its federal health care facilities over to the provinces — a move that was only recently completed when Ste. Anne's Hospital was transferred to Quebec in April 2016. Part of the agreement was that Second World War and Korean War veterans would have the same priority access to these facilities.

Meanwhile, modern-day veterans have the same access to long-term care as the general public.

Minister of Veterans Affairs Kent Hehr said the system has evolved — and what's in place today is much better than the old model.

"In fact, veterans have access to over 1,500 places where they're getting care in their communities, where they can be closer to their families," Hehr told CBC News.

"Our veterans are overwhelmingly happy that they're there. They have access to care in their communities, not in some antiquated place far away from home. It's really actually working quite well."

More than two-thirds of the 6,640 people Veterans Affairs currently supports are in community beds in nursing homes across Canada rather than the remaining 15 provincially operated facilities with veterans wings.

Veterans facilities are expected to turn into nursing homes for the general public when the last of the Second World War and Korean War veterans are gone.

But the Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre in Ottawa doesn't want to lose a program it calls successful. The head of the centre said it gives a higher level of care for veterans thanks to \$8.7 million annually in funding from Veterans Affairs. More than half of its 450 beds are devoted to vets, while the rest are available for the general public.

The centre has developed a reputation for its arts and crafts studios, music therapy, as well as a dedicated psychogeriatric resource nurse

'We have a very valuable asset here' - Akos Hoffer, CEO of the Berley and Bideau Veterans' Health Centre

who helps veterans with dementia, post-traumatic stress disorder and behaviour issues.

"We have a very valuable asset here," CEO Akos Hoffer said. "You can see how beautiful it is. We also have just the most wonderful staff anywhere here, who now have decades of experience of providing care to veterans to civilians. When it comes to veterans they have unique cultural and clinic needs."

"We are more than willing to work with the province and Veterans Affairs to see if there's a way to extend that benefit to modern veterans as well."

George Couillard, injured in a factory during the Second World War, now lives in the centre's veterans wing. He's upset future generations could miss out.

"It bothers me to be honest with you," Couillard said. "Who else has offered so much for his country? No one else has put his life on the line for his fellow man more than veterans."

Disappointment over what's being called an "unfair" double standard by some has sparked veteran advocacy groups and politicians to start pushing for change before the veterans wings close.

"I'm hearing from veterans and their families, this is what their parents want and talked about throughout their whole life," said Ray McInnes, the director of the services bureau for the Royal Canadian Legion.

"Many of these people, they served their country, they never asked for any money from the government. No disability pensions or awards. And yet now, they want to go into long-term care, spend their time with other veterans and they're being denied. Let's take care of all our veterans. It's time for policies to change."

Retired Major-General Lou Cuppens would be ineligible to

'Let's take care of all our veterans. It's time for policies to change' - Ray McInnes, Royal Canadian Legion

access a veterans' home, despite 38 years of service.

"I feel I should be with my brothers in arms," Cuppens said. "It's like being a member of a very large family. We bond when we start our training. And we bond right through our

whole service. We all suffered the same hardships. We have experienced the same combat, strife, the same period of time away from family."

A stalled Ontario private member's bill proposed giving veterans priority access to jump the wait list in Ontario long-term care homes.

It won all-party support at Queen's Park during second reading in April 2015 but still has to be called to committee, said NDP MPP Cindy Forster, who introduced the bill.

"It's very disappointing," she said. "At the same time, this is at a standstill. We have the health system saying the veterans beds aren't even full."

But Ontario MPP Dipika Damerla, who is the associate minister of health and long-term care, said the provincial government is doing its due diligence on the proposed legislation.

"The Liberal government

wants to make

'It's very disappointing.' - NDP MPP Cindy Forster

sure the bill has no unintended consequences," Damerla said.

"To make sure that, as we prioritize people, that people who are in urgent need and in crisis care always have that priority, as well."

The department of Veterans Affairs said that as demographics change, changes may come. If it comes to the point where there is a major problem with veterans accessing long-term care, the department said it will be on their radar.



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



Marijuana For Trauma Inc.
VETERANS HELPING VETERANS
**MARIJUANA For Trauma
(MFT)**

<https://mftgroup.ca/>

**National (US) Gulf War
Resources Center, Inc.**

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



PPCLI
Association
Volunteer Patricia
Program (VPP)

<http://vpp.ppcliassoc.ca>



<http://seanbruyea.com>



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



Veterans Affairs **Anciens Co**
Canada **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
A Community for Canadian He

<http://veteransofcanada.ca/>



Wounded Warriors
Fund

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