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Feature: Veterans Issues - Ice Cube or Iceberg

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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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Veterans Issues - Ice Cube or Iceberg

Nov 2014
Perry Gray - Chief Editor VVi

“ When a government starts trying to cancel dissent or avoid dissent is frankly when it’s rapidly losing its moral authority to govern.” Stephen Harper, Canadian Press, 18 April 2005

“ A Veteran is a Veteran is a Veteran ” (quoted by Canadian Veterans regardless of age and service)

It can be confusing for Canadians to understand the issues of the Veterans Community because of the different perceptions given by the federal government, the media and advocates. The federal government wants Canadians to believe that there are no serious issues and it is providing adequate support to the Veterans Community. Therefore issues are ice cube in size.

Advocates want Canadians to understand that the issues are much more serious and that what has been publicised is just the tip of a very large iceberg.

Since 1945, there has been a significant decrease in federal support for the Veterans Community as the federal government has tried to shirk its responsibilities. The first major example of this was the segregation of WW2 Veterans into those who served overseas and those who served only in Canada.

A Veteran who served in Newfoundland served overseas because it did not become a Canadian province until 1949.

The Canadian Merchant Marine was excluded because it was not part of the traditional military forces. The recognition of the merchant sailors came only after decades of fighting.

The next group to be excluded were the Veterans of the Korean War because it was not a traditional war.

Korea was the first of what has become the usual type of operations in which Canada's military and paramilitary forces are involved. Whether it was the "Cold War", UN operations or the more recent war on terror, the nature of military conflict has changed drastically since 1945. Rarely are there formal declarations of war by countries before military forces enter a conflict. What has remained constant is the risks and threats to which the CF, the RCMP and others have been exposed.

While the CF is required to perform its duties with "unlimited liability", there is no such terminology making Canada and its government accountable for supporting its Veterans. There is acknowledgement of a more limited legal responsibility, which has been constantly decreased as mentioned above.

The very nature of the military – the seclusion of military bases, their culture, training and service – creates a distinct difference from Canadian society.

Military personnel have little influence when it comes to where and when they serve. They are expected to serve as required.

Unfortunately, the federal government bases its support for Veterans on their service rather than their requirement to serve. This is a significant distinction that should be legally and ethically challenged.

This is why the Equitas Disabled Soldiers Funding Society was started. It determined that the NVC provides significantly less support than previous Veterans legislation and comparable provincial workers compensation legislation.

Dividing Veterans should be considered discrimination in accordance with Canadian human rights legislation and provincial workers compensation.

When the media interviews Veterans, their families and advocates, there are a number of issues discussed. They are numerous (based on the many hundreds of recommendations submitted just on the NVC to VAC by various committees and advisers) and it can be difficult for journalists as well as other Canadians to understand the complexity of these issues. At times, it seems that Veterans are advocating for different things.

This is very clearly not the case.

Veterans and their supporters are united in wanting better service from VAC. The only debate is about how this can be done.

Within any group, there will be different views and debate is important to establish common ground. Achieving consensus is challenging. As a member of the VAC stakeholders committee, the Royal Canadian Legion consultation group and more recently the Canada Coalition for Veterans, I can say confidently that the Veterans Community is united in wanting a better quality of life for itself in accordance with Canadian values.

Even the Legion has changed its position with regards to the NVC. In its annual report, the Legion stated:

“ THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Dominion Command of The Royal Canadian Legion publicly withdraw its support for the New Veterans Charter until all the flaws and gaps are amended to the satisfaction of all members of the New Veterans Advisory Groups. The Legion should also withhold its support until the British Columbia

Supreme Court rules on whether the NVC violates the Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms
(Resolution 309, page 156, Committee Reports and Resolutions June 2014)

Veterans should never be defined as second class citizens nor deserving less than the best that Canada can provide.

In stark contrast to the certainty of the Veterans Community, the federal government's position is to announce that it must spend more time studying the important issues (if it bothers to respond to media requests). This is the same answer given to many Canadians when the government is reluctant to take action.

This is evident in the information reported by the media:

" A spokeswoman for Veterans Affairs Minister Julian Fantino noted that a House of Commons committee concluded in a report last June that the majority of veterans are "well served" by the system.

The all-party veterans committee unanimously endorsed a series of recommendations, but opposition parties pulled their support in September when the government's response failed to live up to expectations.

Even still, spokeswoman Ashlee Smith says "minister Fantino is committed to closing gaps. " (CTV News 12 November 2014)

" Mr. Fantino's office didn't act on requests to interview the minister or a government spokesman on the issue. But inside the government, officials suggest the complaints are exaggerated, and promoted by a small group of activists. Budgets have gone up, they note, and in fact, during Mr. Harper's tenure, spending on Veterans Affairs has increased at about the same rate as overall government spending. But there's little doubt it has become a tricky issue. " (Globe and Mail 9 November 2014)

The federal government likes to highlight its recent initiatives as part of its services to Veterans; however, it is relatively easy to find the flaws.

Bill C-27 would grant priority to members of the Canadian Forces who were released for medical reasons, and also allow active and released members with at least three years of service to apply for jobs normally reserved for internal candidates within the public service.

There are two significant problems with this bill: first, the government is reducing the civil service (37,000 jobs cut); and second, only Veterans with the right academic qualifications and job skills could be considered if there is a job. VAC will only pay for vocational training so there is no support for under- or post-graduate academic courses. University education was funded for WW2 Veterans in 1945, by the way.

Veterans Affairs, for example, will lose 872 or 24 per cent of its workforce between 2011 and 2017 and largest proportional cut —about 32 per cent —will be among the front line workers, who provide benefits and services.

As part of its endeavour to have a balanced budget by 2015, the federal government closed nine VAC offices. Was it necessary to do so? The answer is a very definite NO. Based on its own information, VAC had sufficient funds in its budget to maintain the offices as well as funds for other services. Below are the operating costs of the nine offices between 2008 and 2013. Given the amount of "lapsed spending" (funds not used by VAC and returned to the Treasury Board), there were more than enough dollars for every office.

" The Conservative government's \$2-billion plan to help severely injured and poor veterans was greeted with muted enthusiasm Sunday.

Veterans' advocates and opposition parties say the Tories are attempting to deflect a political hot potato rather than ensure reform of "fundamentally flawed" system." (Sun News 18 September 2010)

The summary of "lapsed spending" also refutes this claim. The total amount that was not spent for Veterans services is \$1,269,239,523.00. The federal government actually reduced spending by more than \$1 billion. (Note that the first year reported was during the final year of the last Liberal government, so \$111,711,924 is not included in the final total unspent by the Conservative government.)

The federal government provided these numbers so it can not claim that this is a lie. The minister, Julian Fantino, signed both documents provided below.

One expense which was not reduced was the money paid for senior bureaucrats' bonus pay. It is very disappointing to know that these public servants were given their bonuses for cutting services to the Veterans Community.

"Beyond veterans, long considered a natural constituency for Conservatives, there are signs the Tories are in trouble with ordinary Canadians on the issue. A newly released internal poll on public perceptions of the Canadian Forces suggests the treatment of veterans was registering strongly with respondents.

"Problems that veterans face (42 per cent) and soldiers returning home (29 per cent) were top of mind for many Canadians when asked what they recalled about the (Canadian Armed Forces)," said the Phoenix Strategies Perspectives survey, conducted last May, but released by National Defence online this week.

The survey of 2,025 people found more than two-thirds (67 per cent) of those asked recalled recently seeing, reading, or hearing about issues faced by returning soldiers or their families.

That's a significant increase over 48 per cent of respondents to a similar poll conducted in 2012." (CP 19 November 2014)

"The majority of Canadians don't think Veterans Affairs Canada is doing enough for retired soldiers, according to a survey by...er... Veterans Affairs Canada." (National Post 31 January 2014)

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



VAC - Carrot and Stick Tactics

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"A wise man gets more use from his enemies than a fool from his friends." Baltasar Gracián, *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*

VAC is like an old dog that can not learn new tricks. Its meeting of 19 November in Quebec City is proof of this. VAC only invited representatives of organisations that have not publicly criticised the department in the media. This is similar to the invitation to six organisations to support the NVC in 2005. Any organisation that accepts invitations from VAC should be wary because their participation will be used to demonstrate that these organisations are supportive of VAC. It

may not be apparent at first, but VAC has used such events to “prove” that it is consulting with the Veterans Community, when it is actually doing as little as possible.

VAC rewards Veterans, who are less vocal with trips like the Cyprus excursion earlier this year. Commemorations and photo ops have become the staple of VAC to demonstrate its commitments to the Veterans Community instead of improving services that benefit the entire Veterans Community.

It is all about carrots for the reasonable organisations and sticks for the critics.

VAC is quite happy to associate with some organisations, which claim to have national memberships, but will not divulge information about their internal organisation and membership. Just as six groups were good enough to speak for the Veterans Community on the NVC, VAC fosters the impression that its invitees in Quebec City also can speak for the Veterans Community.

Unfortunately, the majority of the Veterans Community do not belong to any Veterans organisations. Of the more than 700,000 Veterans, those that are members of such groups are less than 100,000. The Legion, which claims to be the largest organisation, has less than 80,000 Veterans among its approximately 300,000 members (based on figures published in the Legion's magazine). That is about 27%. The Legion has known about its “membership crisis” for over four decades and this influenced the active recruiting of non-Veterans. It continues to provide well respected services for the Veterans Community, but also supports local community activities that are not related to the Veterans Community like any other social club, which the Legion has become. Serving the Veterans Community is not its primary charity.

Many young Veterans do not join organisations; however, they are very active in social media such as Facebook. There are tens of thousands of “Virtual Veterans”. This trend has created another gap between older and younger Veterans.

VAC seems to ignore this gap by favouring organisations that primarily cater to older Veterans. It is unethical to continually ignore the majority of the Veterans Community because these “Virtual Veterans” do not join Veterans groups. That is a poor use of the stick because it just creates more resentment, which manifests itself in more criticism in the media.

While it is challenging to gather a quorum in the Veterans Community, VAC makes no real efforts to address its failings. Its meetings are not open to the public like many Parliamentary committees, despite VAC having access to the same technology. It does not publish minutes of its meetings, not even a brief summary. This was criticised by members of the VAC stakeholder committee in 2012. Instead stakeholders had to make their own records. VAC did not even like the stakeholders making video and audio recordings (all electronic devices were banned at one meeting).

Tweeting was not allowed.

Pandering to a select minority is contrary to Canadian democratic practices. These are among the things that all Veterans fight to protect. Unfortunately, VAC seems to believe that like the CF, Veterans can defend democracy but not practice it.

What can be done to rectify this glaring oversight?

One answer is to hold meetings in a location accessible to any Veteran, supporter or advocate. There are lots of auditoriums, theatres and meeting places that can seat thousands. Attendees would be able to record and share these recordings via social media.

If the arts community can record such events and employ state of the art equipment to ensure large audiences can see and hear such events, then so can VAC.

The federal government was able to spend millions celebrating the CF operations in Libya and Afghanistan during a period of “government austerity”. Therefore it is capable of doing something similar to demonstrate that it really intends to address the many grievances of the Veterans Community.

Even the Legion recognises the need to involve more Veterans:

“ BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Dominion Command of The Royal Canadian Legion engage with Veterans by forming a committee made up of Veterans and members of Dominion Executive Council to work strictly with the

NVC to ensure that Veterans and their families are treated fairly and with dignity under this Charter.” (Resolution 309, page 156, Committee Reports and Resolutions June 2014)

If VAC continues to host private meetings, then it will continue to alienate the majority of the Veterans Community. Behaving in an un-Canadian manner is a good way to ensure that Canadians will be hostile and continue to voice criticism in public and to the media.

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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.

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 VVi Database	http://www.veteranvoice.info/db/all_records.asp
 VVi CSAT Forum	http://csat.top-talk.net/



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<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/)

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



PPCLI Association
Volunteer Patricia Program (VPP)

<http://vpp.ppcliassoc.ca>

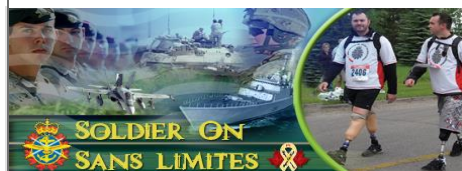


SISIP
Clawback

<http://leavenovetbehind.ca/home>



<http://seanbruyey.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/>



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