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Feature: Is Seamus O'Regan the Next Julian Fantino?

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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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Is Seamus O'Regan the Next Julian Fantino?

By Perry Gray, Chief Editor VVi

VVi 12 Oct 2017 pd db

“When you need help, put up your hand and we will be there for you.” Seamus O'Regan

The title question is being asked because the newest minister seems to have adopted

some of the bad habits of Julian Fantino.

Minister O'Regan was given the position after Kent Hehr failed to fulfil the majority of his mandate letter objectives (4 of 15 as described in an earlier periodical). Now he must try to prove the commitments of his government will be achieved before the next election.

To date, Minister O'Regan has been shy in giving public statements, which is odd for a former journalist. Does he believe that no news is good news? If the answer is yes, then he is following the trend of Julian Fantino.

“Veterans Affairs Canada officials felt former minister Julian Fantino’s public relations’ disasters had “intensified” what was already a glut of “bad press” that had “taken its toll” on the department’s reputation, internal documents show.

The documents are part of a secret briefing binder delivered to current Veterans Affairs Minister Erin O’Toole upon his appointment to replace Fantino in January. They highlight the degree to which officials believe bad publicity, exacerbated by Fantino’s tenure, is to blame for many of the department’s problems.

According to the briefing documents, Veterans Affairs’ reputation problems preceded Fantino’s appointment. They say the “roots” of the department’s “current public environment” can be traced back to 2006, when massive changes were made to veterans’ benefits and supports with the New Veterans Charter.” (National Post 1 June 2015)

It remains a challenge to find any public statements from Minister O'Regan.

He has addressed suicides at least twice:

“The new Minister of Veterans Affairs says the government has taken the triple murder-suicide by an Afghanistan war veteran “very seriously,” but he would not say whether he believes a fatality inquiry should be called to learn from the tragedy. “ (The Globe and Mail 22 September 2017)

He was present for the announcement of the joint DND/VAC suicide strategy, but he did not speak during the CBC and CTV news items covering the event on 5 October 2017, so Canadians do not know his thoughts on the subject unless they watched the announcement event (a challenge as it was not well publicised). His Facebook page statement was “Read our full Joint Suicide Prevention Strategy here...” It was posted between all his other political duties including “Newfoundland and Labrador is ready to do our part for Canada's energy future” and “We can become a supercluster for ocean sciences.”

Kent Hehr also loved Facebook but not concentrating on his mandate.

What has energy in Newfoundland and Labrador, and ocean sciences have to do with Veterans Affairs?

The Veterans Community might appreciate a few words about whether or not the new minister will complete the 2015 mandate. If the answer is yes, when will he complete the tasks?

I preferred reading the comments from Veterans on his Facebook page.

Several Veterans asked questions on his Facebook page. Minister O'Regan did not respond.

Inspired by the Invictus Games, Minister O'Regan posted this comment:

“Veterans have trained longer, pushed harder and dug deeper. It's what makes them such valuable employees. We must ensure that all Veterans are seen as they are: valuable to Canada, and valued by Canadians”

He also announced another initiative to provide more employment for Veterans. What he failed to do was explain why Canada needs another program.

The answer is obvious, the government's previous attempts flopped with his own department failing to be a role model. A total of 115 Veterans in a staff of more than 2700 (roughly 4.26%).

Go to any VAC office and ask how many vacancies exist that should be filled by “valuable employees”.

In the Ottawa district, where I live, the district director wears many hats. She is responsible for north-eastern Ontario, Nunavut and is listed as the senior client services manager. She would probably appreciate some help. Ottawa has a lot of Veterans, but only a fraction of the total number actually is served by the VAC staff. It is quite likely that many Veterans fall through the cracks because there are not enough staff to do “excellent work”.

I have tried repeatedly since Seamus O'Regan was appointed to schedule a meeting. His office has not acknowledged any of my e-mails or telephone calls. I may have to resort to chasing him through the many hallways on Parliament Hill.

If this becomes a reality, then he will definitely have become a worthy successor of Julian Fantino.

Perry Gray is a Regular Force veteran, serving as the Chief Editor of VVi. Perry has been with VVi for 16 years.



Speech From VVi's Chief Editor / Given at the Stakeholders Summit 9-10 May 2016

by Perry Gray on Tue 10 May 2016, 19:14

This is the speech that Perry Gray was allowed to make during the Stakeholder Summit 9-10 May, 2016. It was fueled by 14 years of frustration trying to collaborate with VAC. It was also inspired by a lot of people including Sean Bruyea, Jenny Migneault, Louise Richard, Romeo Dallaire, the staff of Veteran Voice, and the members and supporters of the Veterans Community.

Once again you have gathered us under false pretenses. You call this a stakeholders summit, and yet you really do not want us to participate in the event. Our input is limited to a few minutes during the break-out sessions and the observers among us are not allowed to speak at all. How is this truly a part of the consultation process? Rather it is a very bad example of Canadian democracy. Are we not entitled to the same respect as your colleagues in Parliament, who are allowed to speak in committees and in the respective houses?

You were mandated to have constructive dialogue with Canadians, civil society, and stakeholders.

A stakeholders summit should be about the stakeholders priorities and not VAC priorities.

You want to be treated with respect as an honourable minister. Such respect must be earned first. Veterans know that they may salute the rank of their superiors, but they expect those same superiors to earn the respect of their subordinates. It is known as leadership by example.

Start treating us with respect, and we may reciprocate. Instead this event is a form of intimidation with a smile and you are marginalising the clients who you supposedly serve.

There is much fluff, no substance and certainly no accountability regarding ideas put forward from the last meeting. This is not the agenda of a stakeholder summit that seeks to address the most pressing concerns of injured veterans and their families. Does that mean that all the breakout group efforts that were worked upon in the last summit are thrown into file 13? This is clearly about stakeholder control and distraction. For those who don't really care about addressing the issues affecting the most important stakeholder, i.e., injured veterans and their families, this summit is a perfect sit back and feel good, feel nice, like you're part of something that looks important but means nothing.

Are these summits along with the six announced advisory groups about meaningful stakeholder consultation that produces needed and timely change or merely public relations exercises to ensure media and stakeholder control?

We do not know what is meant by the word stakeholder and few have been contacted by your Stakeholder Engagement and Outreach team to explain why we were selected and what to expect from these summits. Frankly this is typical of the poor communication skills exhibited by your subordinates.

According to your staff, there is no definition of stakeholder, but this is not true:

“Departmental stakeholders” are restricted to registered lobbyists, their employees and corporations employing lobbyists as well as “individuals employed in, contracted by, or who otherwise represent corporations and organizations that have current or anticipated official dealings” with government.”

Given this definition, either most of us should not be here or you have incorrectly labeled us.

You have included the following:

- * clients like me
- * research groups like CIMVIR
- * commemorative groups
- * Canadian Corps of Commissionaires
- * charities
- * private groups
- * advocacy groups and individual advocates
- * lobbyists
- * OVO

You had better explain why we were selected and what we are doing here.

If these summits and groups are closed to most veterans, then participation should require a minimum of either an actively involved community directly affected by VAC policies and programs or a recognized expertise and/or knowledge-base to understand the importance and impact of such policies. Arguably, many invited organizations have neither.

You keep doing the same thing over and over again expecting a different outcome, but this is insanity. It does not matter who says things, they are repeating what other VAC personnel have already said. Every new minister has to have sufficient time to settle into the job before we should expect anything. Again this is a fallacious argument because most ministers are never in the job long enough. It is likely that you will move on before fulfilling your mandate.

I was told that the agenda was only finalised last Friday, despite the fact that this summit has been planned for over a month. Do you expect us to believe that the agenda was not ready after the speakers for this summit were selected? If they had enough time to prepare for this, then why were we not given the same respect? The agenda was also

developed from the last summit and yet there is an obvious lack of continuity. This is the same format as the previous summit that I attended in April 2015. How is repeating the format of the previous government an example of the Prime Minister's statement that you will be held accountable for your commitment to bring a different style of leadership to government. Many of the most important issues are not being addressed and the subjects of the presentations seem odd choices as replacements.

For example the budget, we have no input in this. Why do you think that this should be the first topic?

You would need days to fully explore your budget. It would be better to discuss Re-establishment of lifelong pensions as stated in your mandate letter.

Why are you presenting on medical marijuana when there is a departmental review going on? You are projecting the outcome of the review with your own opinion by discussing it. Why is it okay to talk about this but not other topics? Why are we expected to be here for a second day while your staff fiddle about to have a 90 minute Facebook session. What is our role, to amuse ourselves? You do not need us as a captive audience when you could do this undefined activity at any time.

There is also no discussion of what has happened since the last summit. And it would be nice to know what you have been doing behind closed doors contrary to the Open and Accountable Government. I draw your attention in particular to the Ethical Guidelines set out in Annex A of that document, which apply to you and your staff. For example, you and the Justice Minister recently entered into an agreement to dismantle the VAC stand-alone, legal services unit - in existence since the department was formed. It appears you agreed to transfer responsibility for providing VAC legal services to a federal department in Ottawa - Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). Why???

It would be nice if everyone here was privy to the contents of "Open and Accountable Government" so that we can monitor your compliance.

What about homeless vets, the seamless transition from DND to VAC, the Equitas lawsuit, hiring of staff, the six advisory groups and other very important issues?

On the topic of hiring or re-hiring, will you ensure that Veterans are given a priority for all jobs? And if not, why not? How many people have been hired and what are their jobs? Why do you continue to employ people who have not satisfactorily performed their assigned duties? What have you done to reduce the stressful working conditions for front-line employees?

On the topic of the advisory groups, why do we not know their composition, mandates, terms of reference and other important information. Why did the members have to sign non-disclosure agreements? Again this is in contravention of your government's policy on transparency and accountability.

One concern that I have which affects all of your clients, is the ongoing privacy scandal. You are allowing the Royal Canadian Legion access to client personal information. Rather than improving security, you have been a collaborator in reducing security. Having had unauthorised people examine my own file, I am again shocked by this recent revelation. Here we are years after your department was to have solved its privacy problems and the solutions have not been implemented fully. If you are not competent to safeguard our information, it is highly likely there are other problems.

These summits should be the forum in which you report to Veterans on your progress toward fulfilling your commitments and to help develop effective measures that assess the impact of the organisations for which you are answerable. If the format of the two summits of which you have been minister are examples of your leadership and response to your mandate from the Prime Minister, then you have failed to provide a change in leadership and failed to obey the Prime Minister. Do not blame your failures on lack of time or others. The buck stops at your desk, no one else's.

If you want to immediately prove me wrong then scrap this agenda and have a frank conversation with us. Tell your subordinates to take notes and be prepared to help you provide us with information. Tell us why you deserve to continue as our minister. Tell us when you will complete your mandate and what else you will do, not plan to try, to lay the building blocks for a higher standard of service that will address our needs. Tell us that you are truly listening to Veterans and other Canadians.

I strongly disagree with your philosophy that this is a game and that it is less important whether win or lose, but it is the exercise. No, it is important that Veterans are winners and they are not playing your game. I watched your inspirational video on Youtube.

Remember Kent for whom you work. You work for your clients, and we do not work for you, but we can work with you, if you earn our respect and trust.

I will not belabour you anymore with such concerns, but this is what I expect from you:

a letter to all veterans apologising to them for your failure to deliver on the mandate letter from the Prime Minister in a timely manner;

a letter to me apologising for aggravating my medical conditions;

compensation for this aggravation and wasting my time; and

a private meeting with you so that we can discuss at length my other concerns.

If you are unwilling to do this, then I expect your letter of resignation to the Prime Minister. You can go try to be a minister of another department more suited to your abilities.

This will not be the only time that you will hear this veteran's voice.

Perry Gray is a Regular Force veteran, serving as the Chief Editor of VVi. Perry has been with VVi for 16 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.

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**Veteran's Aide
Memoire**

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



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

<https://mftgroup.ca/>

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

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

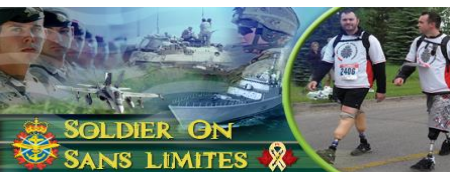


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**V.E.T.S
Veterans Emergency
Transition Services**

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



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