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Feature: **Where is the Lifelong Pension - Lost in the Details**

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*What is VeteranVoice.info?*

*Where is the Lifelong Pension - Lost in the Details*

*Letter to Minister VAC*

*How you can help!*

*Recommended Links*



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## **VeteranVoice.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.



## **Where is the Lifelong Pension - Lost in the Details**

By Perry Gray, Chief Editor VVi

VVi 30 Oct 2017 pd

For many veterans, a lifelong pension is the most important benefit as it acknowledges the pain and suffering experienced in service of Canada. It was not part of the New Veterans Charter (NVC). It also seems to be a low priority for the federal government...again in the

mandate letter given to the new minister, Seamus O'Regan, by the prime minister in August 2017.

This assessment is based on two observations: the location of the pension in the letter; and how it is described (Re-establish lifelong pensions as an option for our injured Veterans).

It suggests that the government does not understand what is most important to Veterans, and that government priorities are more important. This is not a good way to show how much Canada honours the sacrifices of Veterans.

When Canadians buy real estate, their agents stress the importance of "location, location, location". The prime minister fails to appreciate this point by burying the pension in his letter. There is a long (and unnecessary) series of general statements before any objectives are identified.

There are now 19 specific objectives (an increase from the mandate letter given to the previous minister, Kent Hehr, in 2015) and some have already been achieved (according to Veterans Affairs). The pension is number 12.

If the prime minister truly understood what is most important to Veterans, then he would have placed the pension at the top of his list.

It is still unclear as to which objectives Seamus O'Regan will tackle and in what order. The pension was never a priority for Kent Hehr.

The other troubling aspect is that a future pension will be an option. Although it is unclear what is specifically meant by this. The previous federal government suggested that the lump sum of the NVC could be paid out over months or years instead of a single payment. There has been very little information made public by VAC as whether or not the pension will be similar to that of the Pension Act.

There are other parts of the mandate letter which suggest that the government does not understand "Veterans issues".

There is the use of an old term, Permanent Impairment Allowance, instead of Career Impact Allowance. This may seem insignificant, but it does suggest that the letter was not reviewed rigorously before being issued.

Many of the financial benefits discussed remain limited in their provision. The new minister will have to do a lot more to ensure that "Veterans should not have to fight their own government for the support and compensation they have earned".

His new department is still too centred on "living within our fiscal plan" rather than "to ensure that Veterans receive the respect, support, care, and economic opportunities they deserve". This is made obvious by the limited financial support provided by the many

benefits such as Earnings Loss Benefit, Career Impact Allowance, Disability Award (lump sum) and Caregiver Recognition Benefit. As noted in previous periodicals, media stories and Veterans' testimonials, VAC provides the minimum more than the maximum.

Will Seamus O'Regan be able to achieve "your overarching goal will be to ensure that our government lives up to our sacred obligation to Veterans and their families"?

Given what has happened in the last two years, there is a lot of work to be done, and it is unlikely that he can afford to "add priorities to your agenda when appropriate".

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



## **Letter to Minister VAC**

By Perry Gray, Chief Editor VVi

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Dear Mr. O'Regan:

I am honoured that you have agreed to serve Canadians as Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence.

We promised Canadians real change – in both what we do and how we do it. Canadians sent a clear message in the last election, and our platform offered a new, ambitious plan for a strong and growing middle class. Canadians expect us to fulfill our commitments, and it is my expectation that you will do your part in delivering on those promises to Canadians.

We made a commitment to grow our economy, strengthen the middle class, and help those working hard to join it. We committed to provide more direct help to those who need it by giving less to those who do not. We committed to public investment to spur economic growth, job creation, and broad-based prosperity. We committed to a responsible, transparent fiscal plan for challenging economic times.

I expect Canadians to hold us accountable for delivering these commitments, and I expect all ministers to do their part – individually and collectively – to improve economic opportunity and security for Canadians.

It is my expectation that we will deliver real results and professional government to Canadians. To ensure that we have a strong focus on results, I will expect Cabinet committees and individual ministers to: track and report on the progress of our commitments; assess the effectiveness of our work; and align our resources with priorities, in order to get the results we want and Canadians deserve.

If we are to tackle the real challenges we face as a country – from a struggling middle class to the threat of climate change – Canadians need to have faith in their government's honesty and willingness to listen. I expect that our work will be informed by performance measurement, evidence, and feedback from Canadians. We will direct resources to initiatives that have the greatest positive impact on the lives of Canadians, and that allow us to meet our commitments to them. I expect you to report regularly on your progress toward fulfilling our commitments and to help develop effective measures that assess the impact of the organizations for which you are answerable.

I made a personal commitment to bring new leadership and a new tone to Ottawa. We made a commitment to Canadians to pursue our goals with a renewed sense of collaboration. Improved partnerships with provincial, territorial, and municipal governments are essential to deliver the real, positive change that we promised Canadians. No relationship is more important to me and to Canada than the one with Indigenous Peoples. It is time for a renewed, nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous Peoples, based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership.

We have also committed to set a higher bar for openness and transparency in government. It is time to shine more light on government to ensure it remains focused on the people it serves. Government and its information should be open by default. If we want Canadians to trust their government, we need a government that trusts Canadians. It is important that we acknowledge mistakes when we make them. Canadians do not expect us to be perfect – they expect us to be honest, open, and sincere in our efforts to serve the public interest.

Our platform guides our government. Over the course of our four-year mandate, I expect us to deliver on our commitments. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that we fulfill our promises, while living within our fiscal plan. Other issues will arise or will be brought to our attention by Canadians, stakeholders, and the public service. It is my expectation that you will engage constructively and thoughtfully and add priorities to your agenda when appropriate.

As Minister, you will be held accountable for our commitment to bring a different style of leadership to government. This will include: close collaboration with your colleagues; meaningful engagement with Opposition Members of Parliament, Parliamentary Committees and the public service; constructive dialogue with Canadians, civil society, and stakeholders, including business, organized labour, the broader public sector, and the not-for-profit and charitable sectors; and identifying ways to find solutions and avoid escalating conflicts unnecessarily. As well, members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, indeed all journalists in Canada and abroad, are professionals who, by asking necessary questions, contribute in an important way to the democratic process. Your professionalism and engagement with them is essential.

Canadians expect us, in our work, to reflect the values we all embrace: inclusion, honesty, hard work, fiscal prudence, and generosity of spirit. We will be a government that governs

for all Canadians, and I expect you, in your work, to bring Canadians together.

You are expected to do your part to fulfill our government's commitment to transparent, merit-based appointments, to help ensure gender parity and that Indigenous Peoples and minority groups are better reflected in positions of leadership.

Veterans and their families have earned our respect and gratitude. Veterans should not have to fight their own government for the support and compensation they have earned. As Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, your overarching goal will be to ensure that our government lives up to our sacred obligation to Veterans and their families. I expect you to ensure that Veterans receive the respect, support, care, and economic opportunities they deserve. You will ensure that we honour the service of our Veterans and provide new career opportunities, make it easier for Veterans to access services – including mental health services – and do more to support the families of Canada's Veterans. I ask you to work closely with your colleague the Minister of National Defence to ensure a seamless transition for Canadian Forces members to the programs and services of your department.

In particular, I will expect you to work with your colleagues and through established legislative, regulatory, and Cabinet processes, to deliver on your top priorities:

Work with the Minister of National Defence to reduce complexity and strengthen partnerships between Veterans Affairs and National Defence. As both Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, you will drive efforts to close the seam between these two departments and make public a roadmap with key milestones of action.

You will continue the successful implementation of already announced initiatives, including:

1. the increased value of the Disability Award.
2. expanded access to the Permanent Impairment Allowance.
3. providing injured Veterans with 90 percent of their pre-release salary, and indexing this benefit;
4. the new Veterans Education Benefit.
5. the nine re-opened Veterans Affairs service offices, the newly opened office in Surrey, British Columbia, expanded outreach activities to Veterans in the North, hiring of more service delivery staff, and full implementation of all of the Auditor General's recommendations on enhancing mental health service delivery to Veterans.
6. greater education, counselling, and training for families who are providing care and support to Veterans living with physical and/or mental health issues as a result of their

service, including the recently expanded Veterans Family Program at all Military Family Resource Centres.

7. the end of the time limit for surviving spouses to apply for vocational rehabilitation and assistance services.

8. doubled funding to the Last Post Fund.

9. improved career transition services to help Veterans gain skills to successfully transition to the civilian workforce;

10. the Caregiver Recognition Benefit, paid directly to Veterans' caregivers.

11. and the new Veteran Emergency Fund and Veteran and Family Well-Being Fund.

12. Re-establish lifelong pensions as an option for our injured Veterans, while ensuring that every injured Veteran has access to financial advice and support so that they can determine the form of compensation that works best for them and their families.

13. Streamline the current suite of benefits with the goal of reducing overlap and administrative burden, and further improving Veterans Affairs Canada staff performance as well as the client experience for Veterans both as they transition to civilian life and as their needs change throughout their lives. You will also improve transparency and communications so that Veterans and their families have clarity and predictability of available benefits and services.

14. Improve career and vocational assistance for Veterans through ensuring that job opportunities for returning Veterans are included in Community Benefits Agreements for new federally-funded infrastructure projects.

15. Deliver a higher standard of service and care, and ensure that a "one Veteran, one standard" approach is upheld.

16. Implement the creation of a centre of excellence in mental health to enhance research and best practices and establish a second centre of excellence based on the area of greatest need.

17. Increase the Veteran survivor's pension amount from 50 percent to 70 percent.

18. Eliminate the "marriage after 60" claw-back clause, so that surviving spouses of Veterans receive appropriate pension and health benefits.

19. Work with the Minister of National Defence to develop a suicide prevention strategy for Canadian Armed Forces personnel and Veterans.

These priorities draw heavily from our election platform commitments.

I expect you to work closely with your Deputy Minister and his or her senior officials to ensure that the ongoing work of your department is undertaken in a professional manner and that decisions are made in the public interest. Your Deputy Minister will brief you on issues your department may be facing that may require decisions to be made quickly. It is my expectation that you will apply our values and principles to these decisions, so that issues facing your department are dealt with in a timely and responsible manner, and in a way that is consistent with the overall direction of our government.

Our ability, as a government, to successfully implement our platform depends on our ability to thoughtfully consider the professional, non-partisan advice of public servants. Each and every time a government employee comes to work, they do so in service to Canada, with a goal of improving our country and the lives of all Canadians. I expect you to establish a collaborative working relationship with your Deputy Minister, whose role, and the role of public servants under his or her direction, is to support you in the performance of your responsibilities.

We have committed to an open, honest government that is accountable to Canadians, lives up to the highest ethical standards, and applies the utmost care and prudence in the handling of public funds. I expect you to embody these values in your work and observe the highest ethical standards in everything you do. When dealing with our Cabinet colleagues, Parliament, stakeholders, or the public, it is important that your behaviour and decisions meet Canadians' well-founded expectations of our government. I want Canadians to look on their own government with pride and trust.

As Minister, you must ensure that you are aware of and fully compliant with the Conflict of Interest Act and Treasury Board policies and guidelines. Open and Accountable Government has been developed to assist you as you undertake your responsibilities. I ask that you carefully read it and ensure that your staff does so as well. 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. As noted in the Guidelines, you must uphold the highest standards of honesty and impartiality, and both the performance of your official duties and the arrangement of your private affairs should bear the closest public scrutiny. This is an obligation that is not fully discharged by simply acting within the law. Please also review the areas of Open and Accountable Government that we have expanded or strengthened, including the guidance on non-partisan use of departmental communications resources and the new code of conduct for exempt staff.

I know I can count on you to fulfill the important responsibilities entrusted in you. In turn, please know that you can count on me to support you every day in your role as Minister.

I am deeply grateful to have this opportunity to serve with you as we build an even greater country. Together, we will work tirelessly to honour the trust Canadians have given us.

*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.

Email: *info@VeteranVoice.info*

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**Veteran's Aide  
Memoire**

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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/>



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

<http://vpp.ppcliassoc.ca>



<http://seanbruyea.com>



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



**Veterans Affairs  
Canada**      **Anciens Cor  
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**  
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**Wounded Warriors  
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<http://www.woundedwarriors.ca/>

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