

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF VETERAN ASSOCIATIONS IN CANADA

News Release

1st Canadian Parachute Battalion Association
14th Canadian Field Regiment Association
435-436 & Burma Squadrons Association
Air Force Association of Canada
Aircrew Association
The Algonquin Regiment Veterans' Association
Armed Forces Pensioners'/Annuitants' Association of
Canada
The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada
Association
Bomber Command Association Canada
Burma Star Association
Canadian Airborne Forces Association
Canadian Association of World War II Veterans from the
Soviet Union
Canadian Corps Association
Canadian Fighter Pilots Association
Canadian Merchant Navy Veterans Association Inc.
Canadian Naval Air Group
Canadian Naval Divers Association
Canadian Paraplegic Association
The Canadian Scottish Regimental Association
Canadian Tribal Destroyer Association
Dieppe Veterans and Prisoners of War Association
The Dodo Bird Club of Ex-RCAF Flight Sergeants
Ferry Command Association
First Special Service Force Association
Hong Kong Veterans Association of Canada
Jewish War Veterans of Canada
KLB (Konzentrations Lager Buchenwald) Club
Korea Veterans Association of Canada
The Limber Gunners
Métis Nation of Ontario Veterans Council
The Military Vehicle Hobbyists Association
National Aboriginal Veterans Association
National Prisoners of War Association (E.T.) of Canada
Naval Officers Association of Canada, Montreal Branch
Nova Scotia Naval Officers Association
Nursing Sisters' Association of Canada
Operation Legacy
The Overseas Club - Canadian Red Cross Corps
(Overseas Detachment)
The Polish Combatants' Association in Canada
The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada Association
R.C.A.F. P.O.W. Association
Royal Air Forces Escaping Society
Royal Canadian Air Force Pre-War Club of Canada
The Royal Canadian Army Service Corps Association
Royal Canadian Naval Association
The Royal Canadian Regiment Association
Royal Naval Association - Southern Ontario Branch
Royal Winnipeg Rifles Association
The Sir Arthur Pearson Association of War Blinded
The South Alberta Regiment Veterans Association
Submariners Association of Canada (Central Branch)
Toronto Police Military Veterans Association
The Toronto Scottish Regimental Association
The War Amputations of Canada
War Pensioners of Canada
War Veterans & Friends Club
White Ensign Club Montreal
Wren Association of Toronto

VETERANS GROUP SAYS NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO DOWNSIZE VETERANS AFFAIRS

OTTAWA, August 5, 2010 -- The National Council of Veteran Associations (NCVA) stated today that now is not the time to downsize Veterans Affairs Canada.

This comes in response to a July 14th article in the *Globe and Mail* that reports the Government is considering downsizing the Department as a cost-saving measure. A subsequent article in the July 24th *Ottawa Citizen* suggests the Government and senior public servants have failed Canada's veterans insofar as the financial support and benefits available to these returning disabled soldiers.

Brian Forbes, Secretary General of the 58 member-group NCVA, points out that, although Canada's traditional veterans are unfortunately aging, VAC continues to have significant responsibilities to the more than 155,000 veterans who served Canada during the Second World War and Korea.

"Many are presently suffering from their service-related disabilities together with other medical concerns brought on by the ravages of age. The Government, through the various programs administered by VAC, provides appropriate health care benefits, long term care funding and related services such as the Veterans Independence Program to alleviate the needs of these unique and special Canadians," Mr. Forbes said.

NCVA points out that there also are tens of thousands of widows in our traditional veterans' community, and VAC has an ongoing obligation under veterans' legislation to take care of not only our veterans, but their dependants in recognition of their incredible service and sacrifice.

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“These remarkable women need our financial support and the benefits available under the Veterans Pension Act, the War Veterans Allowance Act and the health care programs that are applicable to their current circumstances,” Mr. Forbes said. “In a great number of cases, the widows of our most seriously disabled veterans have acted as caregivers for many, many years, and now require our attention to ensure that their financial and personal well being is looked after.”

“The job of VAC is far from over and indeed is entering a significant phase.”

As pointed out in the *Globe and Mail* article, Mr. Keith Coulter, a former Deputy Minister, has recently submitted a report to VAC. It was NCVA’s understanding, having held a number of meetings with Mr. Coulter, that he was appointed to evaluate the future of VAC and specifically how it was to accommodate veterans and families of all demographics.

VAC administers two major pieces of legislation - the original Pension Act for the traditional veteran and the New Veterans Charter for the modern-day veteran. At the same time, Health Care Benefits, VIP Programs and all other related policies are administered by the Department for all veterans and their families.

“It is quite clear that extensive financial and human resources are required of the Department due to the influx of disabled veterans returning from Afghanistan and earlier Canadian military missions,” said Mr. Forbes. “Once again, given the physical, mental and psychological concerns confronting these returning veterans, the job of VAC will become more complex and intensive in order to address these multi-faceted problems.”

Of significance is that the New Veterans Charter remains a work in progress. NCVA sits on a Committee established by VAC known as the New Veterans Charter Advisory Group together with other stakeholders, leading academics and governmental officials. Regulatory and policy consultation have been pursued to ensure that the substantive provisions in the new legislation satisfy the objectives of the reform. It has been NCVA’s focus to support the policy that priority is attached to Seriously Disabled Veterans emanating from regular force experience.

Over the last two and a half years, the Advisory Group has carried out a study of the New Veterans Charter and completed a report last summer which has been delivered to the VAC Minister. It concludes that, although the New Charter has been reasonably effective in meeting the needs of the Regular Force members medically discharged with specific disabilities, there remain a number of substantial gaps and voids which require further legislative and regulatory amendments. A commitment was made by the Government, and particularly VAC, that the Charter would be considered a living document and that such revisions would be given appropriate consideration so as to fully satisfy the objectives of the new legislation.

“This basic principle was fundamental to our support for the Charter, and NCVA has recently written to the VAC Minister, the Honourable Jean-Pierre Blackburn, indicating that we would call on the Government in furtherance of its commitment to address the substantial recommendations made by the Advisory Group through this recently released report. A failure to do so would reflect, in our respectful submission, a serious betrayal of this commitment,” Mr. Forbes said.

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As a major representative of many of the traditional veterans' organizations, with members suffering from serious disabilities, NCVA has taken the position that the New Veterans Charter should be augmented to consider the plight of the Regular Force member who is medically disabled with a "catastrophic injury."

Although it is recognized that the combined effects of the Disability Award, the Earnings Loss Benefit and the Permanent Impairment Allowance will be potentially of financial assistance to such an individual member, NCVA strongly believes that a further form of compensation is required in order to fully recognize the significant incapacity suffered in these circumstances, and has been recently working actively with senior officials of VAC with the intent of structuring such an award which, in NCVA's view, can be modeled on the Exceptional Incapacity Allowance provisions contained in the original Pension Act.

It remains NCVA's high priority as part and parcel of its involvement with the New Veterans Charter Advisory Group to ensure that VAC also fulfills the Government's commitment to traditional veterans and that the new Program's development does not lead to any reduction in future benefits and services provided to traditional veterans and their dependants.

"It is rather self-evident that VAC has a significant and complex mandate to carry out for all Canadian veterans, both traditional and modern-day. This is no time to be suggesting any diminishment in the role and responsibility of the Department," Mr. Forbes concludes. "Canada's obligation to our Armed Forces, of whom we have asked so much, requires that VAC be retained as a substantive Government presence for the foreseeable future. The idea that it would be viewed as a target in the overall evaluation of the Government deficit is totally unacceptable and a fundamental breach of our legal and moral commitment to these valiant and courageous members of the Canadian Forces."

For more information, please contact Communications at 1 877 60MEDIA.