

## ▶ WHICH FEDERAL PARTY WILL STAND UP FOR CANADA'S VETERANS?

By Brian Forbes, Chairman of The War Amps Executive Committee and Chairman, National Council of Veteran Associations



has been fully validated by the Parliamentary Budget Office's report issued on February 21, 2019, which clearly underlines this longstanding discrimination.

In addition, given tumultuous events last year surrounding the conduct of the Government in relation to the SNC-Lavalin affair resulting in the resignation of two prominent federal Cabinet ministers and the damning report of the federal Ethics Commissioner, together with the Vice-Admiral Norman debacle, it is readily apparent that the integrity and credibility of the Prime Minister and his Government have been placed in serious question.

From the perspective of the veterans' community, there remains a substantial parallel concern. Not only has the VAC portfolio been negligently deprioritized in this process, but the Prime Minister has also betrayed a formal commitment he specifically made to Canada's veterans and their families during the 2015 election campaign.

In the context of the Equitas class action lawsuit, the Prime Minister made a promise to Canada's veterans that, should his party be successful, it would not be necessary for the disabled veterans to continue such a lawsuit as his Government would re-establish the lifelong pensions as an option to the lump sum

**FOLLOWING THE RECENT** federal election, veterans remain vitally interested in the positions to be adopted by the Government and the Opposition parties in this minority Parliament to remedy the longstanding injustice and inequity impacting Canada's disabled veterans and their families.

Working in consultation with the National Council of Veteran Associations, The War Amps (one of its founding members in 1932), will continue to take the position that there is much to do in improving veterans' legislation so as to address the financial and wellness requirements of Canada's disabled veterans and their families. This is particularly so with respect to the Pension for Life (PFL) provisions originally announced in December 2017 and formally implemented on April 1 of last year.

It is self-evident that only a very limited number of seriously disabled veterans and their survivors may benefit from the new legislation when compared to the level of entitlement available under the former New Veterans Charter – some seriously disabled veterans are actually worse off. However, the greater majority of disabled veterans will not be materially impacted by the legislation in that the new benefits under these legislative and regulatory amendments will have limited applicability.

As stated in our many submissions to Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) and Parliament, the Government has not met veterans' expectations with regard to the fundamental mandated commitment to "re-establish lifelong pensions" under the charter so as to ensure that a comparable level of financial security is provided to all disabled veterans and their families over their life course. This financial disparity between the Pension Act and *New Veterans Charter/Veterans Wellbeing Act (NVC/VWA)* compensation

*ABOVE RIGHT: NCVA continues its work to achieve fair compensation for war amputees and seriously disabled veterans. (Maj. Blaise and Stuart Vallières, War Amps Chairman of the Board and National Director of the Montreal Branch are pictured.)*

*"What has happened to the millions of dollars saved by VAC with the passing of tens of thousands of traditional veterans and early peacekeepers over recent years?"*

disability award. It was clearly understood that this commitment would specifically address the basic discrimination that existed between the Pension Act and the New Veterans Charter disability benefits, which disparity has been from the outset at the fundamental core of the class action claim.

As further evidence of the Prime Minister's position on veterans' concerns, we would once again refer to excerpts from the shocking and revealing exchange between young Canadian amputee veteran Brock Blaszczyk and the Prime Minister at a town hall meeting in Edmonton on January 31, 2018:

**Brock Blaszczyk:** I've lost my left leg, I have 58 percent soft tissue loss and 88 percent nerve damage on my right leg. Back on August 24, 2015, you made the promise, and I'll quote it here: "No veteran will be forced to fight their own Government for the support and compensation they have earned." ... What I wasn't prepared for, Mr. Prime Minister, is Canada turning its back on me. So which veteran was it that you were talking about?



*ABOVE: The War Amps proudly serves war amputees from past and more recent conflicts. (Maj. Blaise and Montreal Branch Secretary Jean-Marie Paul are pictured.)*

*ABOVE RIGHT: Only a very limited number of seriously disabled veterans and their survivors may benefit from the new legislation, with some actually worse off. (Pictured: The War Amps Chairman of the Board and National Director of the Montreal Branch Stuart Vallières, Maj. Blaise, and Montreal Branch Secretary Jean-Marie Paul.)*



In this regard, it is essential to recognize that VAC has been substantially impacted by government budgetary constraints in implementing the PFL and related benefits – producing half-measures and inadequate benefit components to overall veterans' legislation.

Notwithstanding the Prime Minister's protestations as to the ability of his Government to finance appropriate veterans' benefits and programs, one has to ask the fundamental question: What has happened to the millions of dollars saved by VAC with the passing of tens of thousands of traditional veterans and early peacekeepers over recent years?

In this context, in relation to the basic issue as to the "affordability" of veterans' programs, the Government has failed to acknowledge the impact on the overall VAC budget of the fact that the greater majority of traditional disabled veterans have passed on over the past several years, resulting in significant savings in VAC's budgetary funding requirements. With the continuing loss of this significant cohort of the veteran population, VAC is no longer required to pay pensions, allowances, health care benefits, treatment benefits, long-term care benefits, VIP (Veterans Independence Program) et al for all of these disabled veterans.

In all fairness, it must be stated that, under the Harper Government's regime, the veterans' community was shoddily treated vis-à-vis budgetary expenditures for veterans' benefits and programs – numerous VAC district offices were closed, front line staffing to assist veterans was dramatically reduced, and budgetary constraints led to a lack of appropriate action to enact necessary reforms to veterans' programs and entitlements. What remains to be seen is whether the new Conservative Opposition will now stand up and be counted during the upcoming Parliament to reverse these years of neglect and injustice.



*“We endorse the position that the Federal Government’s failure to fully implement a plan of action on reforming the New Veterans Charter violated the social covenant owed to Canadian veterans and their families.”*

The War Amps, in accord with the NCVA Legislative Program for 2019-20, will continue to emphasize our fundamental position in the following core recommendations vis-à-vis legislative reform for Canadian veterans and their families:

- That VAC, working together with relevant Ministerial Advisory Groups and other veteran stakeholders, should think “outside the box” by jointly striving over time to create a comprehensive program model that would essentially treat all veterans with parallel disabilities in the same manner as to the application of benefits and wellness policies – thereby resulting in the elimination of artificial cutoff dates that arbitrarily distinguish veterans based on whether they were injured before or after 2006.
- That much more is required to improve the NVC/VWA and that the Government needs to fully implement the Ministerial Policy Advisory Group (MPAG) recommendations presented to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and the Veterans Summit in October 2016 with particular emphasis on:
  - Resolving the significant disparity between the financial compensation available under the Pension Act and the NVC/VWA;



- Ensuring that no veteran under the NVC/VWA would receive less compensation than a veteran under the Pension Act with the same disability or incapacity in accordance with the “one veteran – one standard” principle;
- Utilizing a combination of the best provisions from the Pension Act and the best provisions from the NVC/VWA, producing a form of lifetime pension in a much more realistic manner in order to secure the financial security for those veterans who need this form of monetary support through their lifetime; and

ABOVE: By sharing our long-standing knowledge of amputation with government and policy-makers, NCVA pursues legislative changes that better address the needs of seriously disabled veterans and their families. (Maj. Blaise is pictured.)

RIGHT: Brian Forbes, Chairman of The War Amps Executive Committee and of the National Council of Veteran Associations in Canada



- Eliminating SISIP LTD (Service Income Security Insurance Plan Long Term Disability)/VOCREHAB (Vocational Rehabilitation) and placing all SISIP LTD and VOCREHAB under VAC for all service attributable and nonservice attributable medical releases with no premiums – one program/one service delivery model.

In addition, the following recommendations represent specific statutory and policy amendments in furtherance of this objective:

- Liberalize the eligibility criteria in the legislation and regulatory amendments for the new Additional Pain and Suffering Compensation (APSC) benefit so that more disabled veterans actually qualify for this benefit. Currently only veterans suffering from a severe and permanent impairment will be eligible.
- The Veterans Disability Award (Pain and Suffering Compensation benefit) initially granted to the veteran should be a major determinant in evaluating Career Impact Allowance (CIA)/APSC qualifications. It is the position of WAC/NCVA that this employment of the Disability Award/PSC percentage would produce a more straightforward and easier understood solution to this ongoing issue of CIA/APSC eligibility.
- Create a new family benefit for all veterans in receipt of a Disability Award to parallel the Pension Act provisions in relation to spousal and child allowances to recognize the impact of the veteran’s disability on his or her family.
- Incorporate the special allowances under the Pension Act, i.e. Exceptional Incapacity Allowance and Attendance Allowance, into the NVC/VWA to help address the financial disparity between the two statutory regimes.

IN THE NEWS ... CONTINUED ON PAGE 46

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- Finetune the concept of Attendance Allowance, payable to informal caregivers to recognize and compensate the significant effort and economic loss to support injured veterans, and ensure access reflects consideration for the effects of mental health injuries.
- Establish a newly structured CIA which would reflect the following standard of compensation: "What would the veteran have earned in his or her military career had the veteran not been injured?" This form of progressive income model, which has been recommended by the MPAG and the Veterans Ombudsman's office, would be unique to the NVC/VWA and would bolster the potential lifetime compensation of the disabled veteran as to his or her projected lost career earnings, as opposed to the nominal one percent increase provided in the current legislation.
- We endorse the position that the Federal Government's failure to fully implement a plan of action on reforming the New Veterans Charter violated the social covenant owed to Canadian veterans and their families.



significance – particularly following an election year which has resulted in a minority government where, historically, a new election will in all probability ensue within the next 18 to 24 months.

If the "one veteran – one standard" philosophy advocated by VAC and enunciated in the Prime Minister's recent Mandate Letter to the Minister of Veterans Affairs has any meaning, this glaring disparity between the Pension Act and the NVC/VWA benefits for disabled veterans requires that the new Liberal Government and the Opposition parties seize the moment and satisfy the financial needs of Canadian veterans and their dependants. In so doing, Parliament would finally be recognizing that the longstanding social covenant between the Canadian people and the veterans' community demands nothing less. 🍁

HISTORY FEATURE ... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 28

While Liddell had been helping the Hasty P's take the hill, Crowe kept pestering him over the wireless to "get cracking" and finish clearing up the airfield. A little after 1100 hours, Liddell led his men down the slope towards the barracks and into the face of fire coming from several machine guns and rifles. Suddenly, what had seemed a stroll under a hot sun turned deadly. Between 'A' Company and the Italian positions was a serious wire obstacle. It "was necessary to crawl under it looking for mines, holding up the wire so it wouldn't catch on equipment...and hope that whoever was doing the shooting wouldn't suddenly improve and get a hit." Once they broke through the wire and gained the open airfield, 'A' Company shook out into a perfectly extended line and quick-marched forward, shooting several snipers along the way to the barracks while the machine-gun fire continued to fly harmlessly overhead. The barracks proved abandoned, all clean and tidy, with neatly made beds. Enemy machine-gun fire kept coming at the company, but Liddell was unable to spot its source. What he still thought were mortars also kept firing on the company, their rounds exploding noisily and releasing black smoke clouds. To the northeast on the other side of a vineyard, Liddell spotted a well-camouflaged house and decided it was probably concealing the machine guns. As 'A' Company crawled into the intervening vineyard it came up against more thick tangles of wire. A standoff ensued, with both Italians and Canadians pouring out fire.

The impasse was broken when a section composed of five privates managed to force their way over the wire and close on the two concrete machine-gun emplacements protecting the house. Thirty-one-year-old Private James Milford Butler of Chatam, Ontario was killed in the attack. But Joe Grigas and Jack Gardner flanked one of the positions and killed its crew. This prompted the commanding Italian officer to order his men to lay down their arms, despite the fact that the fortification remained formidable. For their bravery, Grigas received the Distinguished Conduct Medal and Gardner a Military Medal.

Everywhere 'A' Company looked Italians started coming out of holes, as the entire garrison surrendered. Nobody could manage an accurate count of how many prisoners were sent back to the beach. The battalion war diarist estimated 130. Liddell was sure he counted 253. 🍁

ABOVE: The NCVA Legislative Program for 2019-20 emphasizes core recommendations vis-à-vis legislative reform for Canadian veterans and their families.

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