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15 November 2013

File:10-2

The Honourable Julian Fantino, PC, MP
Minister of Veterans Affairs
66 Slater Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0P4

Dear Minister:

On 26 October 2013 The Legion hosted the semi-annual Veterans Consultation Group comprising 20 Veterans organizations. The focus of the discussion was on the upcoming parliamentary review of the New Veterans Charter and our previous 23 April 2013 letter regarding our top three issues for rapid resolution by the Government.

The Veterans Consultation Group asked me to write on their behalf to articulate their unanimous consensus on Veterans priorities to the government.

Firstly, the group unanimously agreed that the Government must resolve, as a matter of priority, the key financial deficiencies of the New Veterans Charter. Veterans Groups, the Veterans Ombudsman, the Parliamentary Committee on Veterans Affairs and the New Veterans Charter Advisory Group have all stated since 2006 that these are significant deficiencies within the New Veterans Charter. Within this context the Group continues to assess the top three issues requiring immediate resolution by the government are:

1. The Earning Loss Benefit (ELB) must be improved to provide 100% of pre-release income, continue for life and include increases for projected career earnings for a Canadian Armed Forces member;
2. The maximum disability award must be increased consistent with what is provided to injured civilian workers who received general damages in law court; and
3. The current inequity with regards to ELB for Class A and Class B (less than 180 days) Reservists for service attributable injuries must cease.

These deficiencies are independent from any recommendations which may stem from the required wider Parliamentary Committee review. The Consultation Group

commends the Government for supporting the expanded review of the New Veterans Charter and we recognize the importance of a transparent and open review. Veterans groups, Veterans and their families and experts must have an opportunity to provide evidence to this process and their concerns be heard. The Veterans Consultation Group agrees with the deficiencies identified in the Veterans Ombudsman's report "Improving the New Veterans Charter." The report provides independent and well researched recommendations and as such should be used as the baseline for the Parliamentary Review.

However, it is also time to take action now! Collectively, we call upon the government to expedite the review of the New Veterans Charter while at the same time addressing the priorities that we have identified. In that regard, it is timely to address these issues in the next round of budget discussions and submissions in preparation for the upcoming spring 2014 budget.

The Veterans Consultation Group would like to extend its support of the recent submission by the Canadian Institute Military Veterans Health Research (CIMVHR) for funding consideration in the next federal budget. CIMVHR is establishing itself as an unprecedented and independent leader in Veterans health research in Canada. With the support of 29 universities, the Department of National Defence, your Department and our Allied partners, it is becoming the centre of expertise for the coordination and knowledge network of Veterans health research in Canada. The long term effect of independent research on military and Veteran health is significant to ensure a successful transition and a lifelong quality of life. On behalf of all Veterans and their families, we strongly encourage you to positively support in the 2013/2014 budget the CIMVHR funding request to establish itself and ensure its long term success as a truly Canadian independent centre of expertise for military and Veteran health research.

Lastly, the Group had an opportunity to have a lengthy discussion with Medic Cousineau and his partner Thai. As we know there is no magic solution for the treatment of Operational Stress Injuries, however the impact and value of assisted animal therapy cannot be understated when meeting "Cous" and Thai and hearing their story. The impact of this relationship on his well-being and quality of life is significant. The Group supports the concept of animal assisted therapy and calls upon your Department to expedite the evaluation of the research to ensure that appropriate decisions are made with regards to the use of animal assisted therapy complementary to traditional treatment options for our Veterans and their families.

We trust that you will receive our priorities and recommendations favourably and we look forward to providing substantive consultation on Veterans issues. The Veterans Consultation Group will meet again in April 2014 and we request a positive response to our priorities.

Yours truly,

Reviewed and approved for mailing by the following veterans organizations in attendance at the 26 October 2013 meeting:

Name	Title	Organization
Gordon Moore	President	The Royal Canadian Legion
Brian Forbes	Chairman	National Council of Veterans Association
Deanna Fimrite	Dominion Secretary	Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans of Canada
Derrill Henderson	National Secretary	Hong Kong Veterans Association
Tom Brooks	Deputy Master, Capital Division	Company of Merchant Mariners
Peter Milsom	Representative	Naval Association of Canada
Paul Baiden	President	Canadian Naval Air Group
Cal Small	President	RCMP Veterans Association
Ron Griffis	President	Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping
Ray Kokkonen	President	Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association
Ted Kaulbach	Representative	NATO Veterans
Trapper Cane	President	The Canadian Army Veterans
Robert Thibeau	President	Aboriginal Veterans Autochtones
Jerry Kovacs	Representative	Canadian Veterans Advocacy
Blaine Barker	President	Royal Canadian Naval Association of Canada
Richard Blackwolf	President	Aboriginal Veterans and Serving Members Association of Canada
Al Grice	Vice President	Airborne Regiment Association of Canada
Dean Black	Executive Director	Air Force Association of Canada
Don Leonardo	President	VeteransofCanada.ca

cc: The Honourable James M. Flaherty, Minister of Finance
The Honourable Robert Nicholson, Minister of National Defence
Senator, The Honorable Lieutenant-General Roméo A. Dallaire, Chair of the
Senate Sub Committee on Veterans Affairs
Mr. Royale Galipeau, Chair of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs
Mary Chaput, Deputy Minister
Guy Parent, Veterans Ombudsman
Alice B. Aiken, Director Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health
Research