

“The New Veterans Charter: Moving Forward”

Report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

June 3, 2014

On September 26, 2013, the Minister of Veterans Affairs asked the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs to do a comprehensive review on the New Veterans Charter and, subsequently, he asked the Committee to “*express ... exactly what is our shared duty, responsibility, mandate, obligation, commitment, or covenant to Canadian veterans.*”

Today, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs issued its Report on the review of the New Veterans Charter (NVC), “*The New Veterans Charter: Moving Forward*”.

While on the surface, the recommendations made in the Report appear, for the most part, to be what veterans and their advocates have been requesting, the devil is in the details.

One veteran points out that while, on paper, the increase in the Earnings Loss Benefit (ELB) that is paid to disabled veterans will be increased to 85 per cent of their net income, with a cap of \$70,000, it will provide veterans with less financial support than the present regime which provides for 75 per cent of the veteran’s gross income with no cap. The Veterans Ombudsman recommended that the ELB should be 90 per cent of their gross income, not net income.

The Committee Report indicated that the amounts paid to injured veterans should reflect the awards granted to injured workers under provincial workers compensation plans and amounts awarded by the courts in civil actions. However, many veterans feel that the monthly Disability Pension under the old Pension Act was “*a nice reminder that I haven’t been forgotten*” and that the lump sum payment is the Government’s way of getting rid of them. Several studies have shown that the lump sum payment does not provide veterans with the same financial support in the long term. Members of the Committee agreed stating “*Members agree with the findings of several studies showing that the lifetime amount paid under the Pension Act for pain and suffering was generally higher than the disability award paid out under the NVC.*” However, one of the Committee members indicated that the issue of replacing the lump sum payment with the previous Disability Pension was “*not an option*”.

Many veterans feel that the lump sum payment, while “*having a huge lump sum of money, yes, it makes you feel good right in the beginning, but do you know what? It won’t last, especially if you invest it into a market that is as unsure as it has been over the last five years.*”

Several veterans have invested their lump sum payments in purchasing a home, only to be unable to subsequently sell the property when they move. Another problem facing injured veterans is the high rate of divorce, at which time, their lump sum payment, which is to compensate them for their pain and suffering is considered “*matrimonial property*” and is divided between the spouses.

On several occasions veterans have accused the Government of “balancing the budget on the backs of veterans”. The Committee Report gives tacit acknowledgment of this when it states that some believe that “*simply returning to the initial spirit of non-confrontation that was the basis of all pieces of legislation supporting veterans that had been passed over the years, but that seems to have been lost to bureaucratic or financial considerations*”.

While the initial reading of the Committee Report offers some hope the problems faced by our veterans are being addressed, a closer reading shows that there are still problems and that some of the recommendations will create new problems. The other concern is that while Committee members made the recommendations, the Government is not bound to implement any of them. In the words of a veteran “*This is where the rubber hits the road*”.

The important issue not dealt with by the Committee members is “A veteran is a veteran is a veteran no matter when or where they served.” Canadians do not believe that there are two classes of Canadians and they definitely do not believe that there are two classes of veterans.

Veterans and Canadians will continue to watch for action on these very important issues.

They fought for us. Now, we fight for them.