

**JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE BY VAC AND DND ON VETERANS ISSUES  
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**REPORT**

**by Larry Gollner, Patron, CPVA**

On Sunday, 19 September 2010, the Ministers of Veterans Affairs and National Defence held a joint press conference in NDHQ to announce a package of amendments to the New Veterans Charter (NVC). During the press conference the Ministers outlined the scope of the coming amendments to the NVC. They concentrated on how the changes to the Charter would provide financial benefits to our severely wounded comrades. The Ministers repeatedly stated that the Government of Canada is steadfast in its determination to stand by all our veterans and none more so than those suffering from serious and often incapacitating wounds and injuries. As well, the Ministers explained that given the scope of the coming changes to the NVC and the financial impact of said changes, Parliament's approval is required. This approval process may take some time, however, the Ministers did not foresee any difficulties in securing the approval of Parliament.

During their briefings the Ministers were at pains to explain that the package of changes being proposed to the NVC is just the first step in a series of coming amendments addressing the known weaknesses in the NVC. These weaknesses were initially identified by the NVC Advisory Group which is made up of representatives of all of Canada's veterans through the veterans associations from across the country. The NVC Advisory Group consists of veterans who worked for four years to identify and document the problems with the NVC along with suggestions on how to move forward. The Minister of Veterans Affairs and the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs have both accepted the Advisory Group's comprehensive report. In the case of the House of Commons Committee, its all party membership endorsed the report strongly and backed the report with numerous recommendations of their own on how to improve the NVC.

Last month our Veterans Ombudsman, at a press conference, made public some of the weaknesses of the NVC and the frustrating complications of dealing with Veterans Affairs administrative procedures. His actions undoubtedly helped bring our wounded comrades' problems, and in some cases plight, to the public's attention. However, the administrative problems were well known and the work to resolve them and also NVC problems have been underway for a considerable period. It will cost two billion dollars to fund the cost of the first five years of the package of changes to the NVC highlighted on Sunday. This is a huge sum and clearly indicates the Government's determination to support Canada's veterans.

The first round of changes to the NVC outlined by the Ministers will not solve all its problems. However, the changes presented are significant and taken with other changes to Veterans Affairs administrative procedures, which are expected soon, will help us all. When in place, the changes to the NVC will both help our incapacitated veterans while giving meaning to the oft used expression that the NVC is a living charter. We have now seen the first indication of life in the Charter.