

## **Report: 2010 Veteran's round-table conference**

On January 27 I represented CPVA at a round table in Ottawa hosted by the Liberal party focusing on the New Veterans Charter (NVC) and other veterans' issues. I was asked to be a panel member and gave a short presentation on what I feel are the issues with the NVC. Many feel the NVC was created because the old veteran's legislation was not sufficient to deal with the modern day veterans. The NVC did not need to be created all that was required is a review of the past veterans pension act and training regulation. Veterans' legislation is very complicated and over the last 60 years has had many changes, and everyday I still learn new things about veteran's legislation. I am sure there are many out there that will disagree with me; however, at the end of the day what the NVC does to the status of veteran is important. Here are the highlights of my presentation at the panel.

An injured soldier who comes under the NVC will receive 75% of their salary, at age 65 VAC stops the income replacement so the veterans is off the benefits. VAC will tell us the veteran then qualifies for all the same benefits any other Canadian citizen is entitled too, old age, CPP, etc. It has taken some time for me to realize if at age 65 the veteran is entitled to all the same benefits as all other Canadian citizens, this means the veteran is consider and will be treated like every other normal citizen, in a sense the veteran has lost their status as veteran in the community.

The NVC takes out the pension act and the social contact to which the citizens of Canada and the government are responsible to look after veterans because of the sacrifice they have given to this country.

The NVC has created different classes of veterans. A veteran from the 90's is treated different than a veteran from Afghanistan. A veteran from the 90's is treated different than a veteran from WWII. I feel it is important to remember and respect the sacrifices of veterans from the past; however, the damage from a bullet is the same to the person regardless if they served in 1914, 1940 or 2010. The suffering of family for the dead and wounded is also the same, so should veterans not have the same benefits? Creating different treatment for veterans goes against the Charter of Freedoms and Rights in this country where it states all citizens are treated equal.

In the veterans community we can all point fingers to blame someone for the treatment that is happening to veterans; it is easy to blame the government in power or the bureaucrats, however, I feel we need to look inwards to the veterans' community. Within the veterans' community there is so much infighting, new organizations starting and the way the veterans' community has done business has not changed in 60 years. As long as the veteran community is not united then it makes it easier for the bureaucrats to dived us and do what they want.

During the development of the NVC I was not asked if I wanted the pension act to be taken out and I know many other veterans were not asked as well. I have heard people working on the NVC were sworn to secrecy, and I can understand that puts people in a difficult position. However, if we as the veterans' community stand united and say to the bureaucrats and government "no we as a community will allow secrecy we will only allow transparency" then the government and bureaucrats have no choice but to do as the community wants.

In the 14 plus years I have been involved in veterans' issues and veteran organizations; I have been on a journey full of learning and frustration. I have tried to leave the politics and advocating of the veterans issues but I keep getting drawn back in. As much as the frustration of veteran's infighting can wear a person down, deep down in my heart I want to do the best I can to make sure the veterans of tomorrow are properly looked after. I want the veteran of tomorrow to look back and say "thank you for looking after me and my family" not have them say "what have you done, thanks for making it harder". After all is that not we as veterans of today should be doing for veterans of tomorrow?

At the end of the day we can all argue and point fingers at each other and let the politics of veteran's culture cloud us from what is happening around us. I feel if we as a veterans' community/organizations do not stand united we have given a blank cheque to the government and bureaucrats to do what they want.

With a stroke of the pen the social contract and pension act was taken out of legislation. The question I pose to all veterans is what will be gone next when you wake up?

The solution for this huge problem is we need to work together. The head of veteran organizations need to tell VAC and the government we will no longer be divided we will no longer give up our rights as veteran. But before we as a community can do that we need to clean up our own back yard and stop making different classes of veterans. We must honour and respect the sacrifices and conflicts of past veterans, but we must also understand we are people with families who have chosen to serve our country. Remember a soldier does not choose where they serve, or what types of conflict they serve in, they just choose to stand by the flag and serve this country. I feel that is one thing all veterans from any era have in common.