

## NVOC PRESIDENTS REPORT ON A VAC DM'S "COFFEE CLUB" MEETING –"VIMY RIDGE DAY" 9 APRIL 2021

A meeting of Veteran advocates and the VAC DM and senior staff was held "virtually" [Microsoft "Teams"] on Friday 9 April 2021 from 1030 to 1230hrs.

My "Observations" follow:

- Attendance at these events has grown. When I first attended four years ago, the advocates could fit into the DM's office (Legion; ANAVETS ; Peacekeepers [ two groups], Brian Forbes ; Aboriginal Veterans and ourselves. At this meeting there were 18 different Veteran "voices". Some of the new groups are "RAINBOW" Veterans ; The Defence Team PRIDE Group ; Women in Defence ; RCMP Veterans ; The National Association of Federal Retirees ; "Soldiers helping Soldiers" ; Persian Gulf Veterans ; RWANDA Veterans, and others.

COMMENT: the challenge will be to speak with one voice for Veterans. NVOC has always been keen on "A Veteran is A Veteran". There are now special interest groups within the Veterans community.

- The DM recognized Vimy Ridge celebrations and also the passing of The Duke of Edinburgh. We are all deep into the COVID-19 "third Wave" and must all continue to be safe and cautious. Get Vaccinated.
- **Military Sexual Trauma (MST)** is the new term that was a very "Hot" issue for several. Harassment and discrimination are a concern. VAC will accept disability claims for MST on face value and will accept what is described. About 75% of claims are from females and 25% are from males. There is a need for peer support programs [New Requirement]. This is a moral injury.. New resources are coming within the CAF to address MST – duty to respect.
- VAC continues to shrink the backlog of disability claims – they now have over 350 new, trained , staff working to adjudicate claims –they are referred to as "SPIKE Teams". VAC is well aware of the "wait time" issue for Veterans. They continue to receive about 1500 telephone calls per day.
- VAC has completed a Veterans Survey 2020 [ will be posted on their website ]. The last survey was 2017. Lots of statistics on how well the service delivery is going! No surprise that the younger Veterans are the least satisfied.
- The Veterans Emergency Fund is distributing about \$1.5 M each year – about 75% of applications are approved within 48 hours.( NOTE to Ted This should be highlighted in one of our weekly reports.)
- Communications with VAC continue to seek Veteran engagement. They have a new program "Lets Talk" [ new to me!]. Their monthly newsletter is

- available on line – you just need to sign up. The Canadian Census [available in May] will have a Veteran identifier – the first time since 1971,
- The RCMP had three attendees and they are going through much the same issues and concerns as is the CAF. They did raise the issue of marriage after age 60 which is a concern to some of our members.
  - The Legion has closed all Branches in Alberta and Ontario - some are open in the Maritimes and Saskatchewan. They will conduct a “Virtual” Dominion Convention 13 to 15 August. They are doing a study on inclusiveness and diversity that should report mid summer, and they are taking a fresh look at the conduct of the annual Poppy campaign,
  - Ministerial Advisory Groups can anticipate an “announcement” soon.
  - The class action lawsuit related to Veterans service at Saint Anne’s is nearing resolution. Of interest is that the 18 Veterans Hospitals that once existed now have the roughly 4000 Veterans in Long Term Care in over 1000 facilities across the nation. Veterans want to be "close to home".
  - An exciting new member is from “Treble Victor” a business networking group that makes effort to hire Veterans. They are promoting a “Buy from Veterans” program for veterans in business. Their mission is to enable ex-military leaders to achieve their full potential in the marketplace, through our common values, teamwork, mentorship and our network’s connectivity. <https://treblevictor.org/>
  - NVOC items were:
    - to ask about a “COVID” Dividend [ similar to the Peace Dividend] where all Departments will be asked to return resources to the centre to help pay the debt. Our concern that progress made in wait times will be impacted by future cost cutting efforts and “Diminishing Budgets”? DM’s response was that the Government respects it’s “statutory obligations”;
    - another group had asked about lack of response to letters to the Minister? I also asked about the NVOC letter sent May 2020 to the Minister without a reply. I will recirculate the letter to Directors and Senior Advisors.( The letter dealt with CF98 and the Reservist; Environmental damage incurred due to service; the claim adjudication process amongst other issues); The DM said that he would investigate this issue
    - NVOC has maintained our priority of effort to be Long Term Care (LTC) for Veterans and their families – with an emphasis upon keeping the Veteran “at home” for as long as is possible. The current pandemic has highlighted flaws in the “Institutionalized” LTC that Veterans are confronted with – the main flaw being high orders of death! Approximately 2000 veterans are in 463 LTC facilities that have had outbreaks. About 86 veterans have tested positive for COVID-19. NVOC advocates for reference to “people” NOT “Beds. We advocate for spending more on home care than institutional care. Perhaps there is a place for a system that calls for people to be cared for in their homes as long as possible, even as people lose functioning capabilities? .The money follows the person - instead of funding being assigned to a bed, funding is assigned to an individual, who has the choice of how to use the money within

certain parameters. The VIP program is a wonderful benefit for those eligible Veterans.

There were some dynamic moments during this meeting! Not every one is finding joy in their work!