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Distribution List

Dear Ministers:

The Royal Canadian Legion has serious concerns with the response tabled by Government on 1 October 2014 to the 14 recommendations listed in the Third Report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA).

The Legion and other Veterans Organizations have long advocated that the New Veterans Charter needs to be a living document. That was the intent on its implementation in 2005. Bill C55 was the first step in that process and it was hoped that the announcement on 1 October would be the beginning of a continual process of review and improvements of the charter adapting to the needs of those it is designed to serve. However, in its response, the Government has not clearly laid out that this will be the case in the two phased plan. Many aspects in both phases lack definition and defined timelines for implementation.

The Legion is very disappointed that the important issues, those recommendations listed in Phase Two of the announcement which have the greatest financial impact on both Veterans and their families, again appear to be sidelined by the repeated phrase "requires more due diligence". As each day passes, Veterans and their families in need of assistance will continue to be adversely affected by this Government's inaction.

On 20 August 2014, the Legion, on behalf of the signatory members of the Veterans Consultation Assembly, made representation to the Minister of Veterans Affairs outlining the collective sense of what is needed to be done immediately to assist Veterans and their families. Those points were:

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 attributed injuries must cease.

At the same time, the letter called upon the government to review the following issues in addition to the above:

- the unduly restrictive application of the Permanent Impairment Allowance (PIA) provisions of the New Veterans Charter unreasonably constrains the number of disabled veterans who are able to qualify for appropriate levels of entitlement for this important allowance;
- The Exceptional Incapacity Allowance (EIA) concept founded under the *Pension Act* should be incorporated in the New Veterans Charter. This allowance has traditionally addressed the impact of the disabilities suffered by 100% veteran pensioners with reference to their difficulty to cope with their overall capacity. The introduction of EIA to the New Veterans Charter would augment the limitations of the Permanent Impairment Allowance, particularly in the circumstance where a seriously disabled veteran confronts the ravages of age;
- In order to recognize the care giving requirements that many disabled Veterans confront to cope with their incapacities, the Attendance Allowance provisions of the *Pension Act* should be added to the New Veterans Charter in recognition of the financial costs faced by many families in this context; and
- The New Veterans Charter should acknowledge that Veterans with dependants should receive a higher level of compensation either through the augmentation of the Lump Sum Disability Award or an increase in Earnings Loss Benefit for such Veterans and their families.

Our concerns remain valid, yet unanswered. The Government continues to say that these recommendations require further study and analysis. The time for action is now. I fear a possible scenario where the recommendations of Phase Two of the announcement will be incorporated into the 2015 budget document; this document will be tabled and then an election writ will be dropped before the budget can be passed and the recommendations implemented. They would then not come up for consideration until late Fall 2015 or early 2016. Our Veterans and their families cannot wait that long; they need the support now.

The Legion will commence an action plan to bring these issues to our members and the general public.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Eagles', written in a cursive style.

Tom Eagles
Dominion President

Distribution List:

The Honourable Julian Fantino, Minister of Veterans Affairs
The Honourable Robert Nicholson, Minister of National Defence
The Honourable Joe Oliver, Minister of Finance
The Honourable Tony Clement, President of the Treasury Board

cc: The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada