

Stand up for Canadian veterans

Voice your concerns with those in office

[Tom Carney](#) / North Shore News

November 10, 2013 12:00 AM

Every year when I was growing up my father would take me down to the Cenotaph on Remembrance Day.

I was about six when I first started attending and most of my friends and their dads were there too.

What I remember most was the pomp and ceremony of the event. I had lots of questions. Are those guns real? What are those ribbons the veterans were wearing? Why am I in short pants in November? Those short pants were part of my Scout uniform. It's cold in Ontario in November. A lot of times it felt like it was going to snow on Remembrance Day and on a few occasions it did.

After the ceremony the vets retreated to the Legion hall and I went home for a cup of hot chocolate and a pair of long pants.

Tomorrow is Remembrance Day and our thoughts turn once again to our veterans. These days the veterans' battle isn't with the bad guys it's with their own government.

Veterans have complained for years about the programs and compensation under the Veterans Charter, which was brought in in 2006. Under the legislation, exsoldiers saw the decadesold pension for life system replaced with a worker's compensation-style lump sum award and allowance.

A detailed actuarial analysis by Veterans Ombudsman Guy Parent found that some of the most disabled veterans face old age in near poverty under the new charter.

Nobody wants that and it prompts the question: What is our commitment to our veterans? Canadian veterans and their families are entitled to respectful treatment and adequate standards of care. That should be a given but sadly it's not.

Parliament is sitting on a report from the Veterans Ombudsman that addresses veterans' concerns around support services for families, financial security, an improved standard of living and more supports for employment opportunities. Implementation of the report would immediately benefit veterans.

A broader question, and a more difficult one to answer in my opinion, is whether there is or ought to be a sacred trust or social obligation between Parliament and the veterans? Opinion is divided.

The academics say no. The Ottawa Citizen in a recent editorial declared that, "We owe them that obligation. Always."

A second question that follows the first is: Should seriously wounded veterans returning home enjoy special status or privilege with regard to medical care? I'd be cautious here.

Right now, at least in theory, we have a medical system where everyone has equal access to care. Those most in

need are the first to be seen. Is that something we want to change? Do we want to replace need with merit? And if so, just how would we determine who is most deserving of care? These are not easy questions but it is a discussion we must have - in Parliament not the courts.

One thing is certain, when it comes to the treatment of wounded veterans in this country we have not always put their interests first. We can and must do better.

If you care about this issue, call or write to your member of Parliament and let them know how you feel.

Tom Carney is the former executive director of the Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society. Ideas for future columns are welcome. tomcarney@telus.net

© 2015 North Shore News