

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

RE: Duty to Veterans

With reference to the Ottawa Citizen Editorial of July 31, 2013, there is indeed a social covenant between Canada and its veterans and their dependants, notwithstanding the highly inappropriate opinion expressed by Professor Robinson in his Opinion Piece of August 5, 2013.

As historic background, when Canadians prepared for the battle of Vimy Ridge in 1917, they were visited by the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Borden, who offered the following commitment:

“You can go into this action feeling assured of this, and as the head of the government I give you this assurance; that you need have no fear that the government and the country will fail to show just appreciation of your service to the country in what you are about to do and what you have already done. The government and the country will consider it their first duty to prove to the returned men its just and due appreciation of the inestimable value of the services rendered to the country and Empire; and that no man, whether he goes back or whether he remains in Flanders, will have just cause to reproach the government for having broken faith with the men who won and the men who died.”

This statement of principle has been seen by many in the veterans community as the genesis of Canada’s social covenant to veterans and their families; a form of implicit contract which has been at the foundation of veterans legislation from World War I to the present day.

Serving in the Canadian Forces is a demanding and inherently dangerous career choice. When Canadians put on a uniform for our country, they – and by extension their families – make an extraordinary personal and professional commitment and sacrifice. Veterans are different from the average citizen – because of their willingness to put their lives on the line to serve their country, and because of the potential long term impact of military service on their health.

Since 1914 to the present day, members of the Canadian Forces have been injured or disabled in the line of duty. Many sustained injuries that affect their ability to do their jobs and limit their employment in the military.

As a fundamental tenet of Canada’s social covenant to veterans, when these injuries occur, members of the Canadian Forces expect to be able to reestablish themselves in the civilian community and be gainfully employed. If their injury or medical condition leaves them unable to work, they expect that their standard of living will not be compromised because of their service to their country, and that they will still be able to provide for their families. If they are killed in action, they expect their families to be cared for and have the services they need. If they develop health problems later in life

related to their military service, they expect to receive treatment, rehabilitation and support.

These are reasonable expectations for members of the Canadian Forces: the opportunity to work and – if they are not able to work – security for themselves and their families. We owe a unique debt of gratitude to members of the Canadian Forces who put themselves at risk on our behalf. We have a moral and legal obligation to provide services and supports that acknowledge their sacrifice and respect their dignity.

The Government of Canada should be ashamed to take a position in a Canadian court that fails to recognize the fundamental social covenant that exists between veterans, their dependants and the people of Canada.

Sincerely,

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

Brian N. Forbes, B.Comm., LL.B.

Chairman, National Council of Veteran Associations in Canada
Chairman, Executive Committee of The War Amps