

Veterans deserve better

The following letter, addressed to Eglinton ? Lawrence MP?Joe Oliver, was submitted to the Citizen for publication.

As I have been receiving almost daily emails from various friends in the Conservative Party, I thought I should respond and explain why I have been reluctant to renew my financial support of your party lately.

You should know that I'm ok with politics as usual ? even disingenuous ads like the one you sent me. So far as I know, there are American billionaires that support Keystone ? some Canadian ones too. And I'm ok with all that ? I don't think there's anything inherently wrong with billionaires. In fact, I'd like to be one myself. I can live with comments like these that are over the top ? it's politics and I get it.

But where the governing party ? your party ? has lost me is in our apparent treatment of our Armed Services veterans. Or more specifically, our apparent mistreatment of those who have served their country.

I admit some bias. My father served in Canada's Air Force during the war and my father-in-law saw action in the North Sea and during D-Day. My uncle was a career member of the services and one of my son's best friends currently serves with the Princess Patricia Regiment in Edmonton. I even spent a short stint at military college. So full disclosure ? I am vested in the military.

The tragic suicides that have been attributed to psychological damage from Afghan missions and the heavy-handed approach to closing veteran centers has been well publicized. Yet Veterans Affairs Minister Julian Fantino's inability to keep his commitment to seriously meet with concerned veterans recently signals to me that, at best, he is insensitive to veteran concerns, at worst, he does not consider their problems worthy of his attention. And he represents your government on these matters.

Now maybe you are just losing the public relations battle. But from my lens, I see the government response as you are meeting your obligations to the military. But yours is the party that finally raised the status and priority of the military. The sense I had was that finally, after almost 40 years of neglect, the Canadian government was making a commitment to provide modern kit, training and support to the Armed Services and using them appropriately to support Canadian interests abroad.

Sir, my impression is that commitment is sadly lacking, as evidenced by recent events involving veterans. You can do better. We, as a nation, can do better.

My wife and I have stood on the 401 bridges and honoured soldiers' families whose child's body has been brought home. We unflinchingly attend the Bolton Cenotaph ceremony each Remembrance Day and appreciate seeing our MP, David Tilson, and other of the people's representatives honour the fallen. But these are the easy tasks. A couple of hours out of each year does little for those that have taken on such risk on our behalf only to return home alive but in need of help to get back some of the normality of life they may have lost protecting our national interests.

I understand that fiscal constraints force hard choices. In my opinion, this is one area where more latitude should be afforded our veterans.

So, back to why I haven't sent in any funding for the Conservative Party lately. My wife and I have decided we would feel better if, instead, we increased our support to The Wounded Warriors of Canada Fund for the reasons I've cited above.

Don't worry. We will likely continue to vote for your party ? the other options are too dismal to contemplate. And I don't expect a response to this note. One can only hope, given enough comment, that your party ? and maybe the others too ? would consider how we might serve better those that have served us and now need more than we seem willing to offer.

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