



Hamilton

CITIZEN COMMITTEE REPORT

To:	Chair and Members Emergency and Community Services Committee
From:	John M. Clarke Hamilton Veterans Committee
Date:	March 13, 2012
Re:	Correspondence regarding cancellation of Remembrance Day Services at the Federal Building (HVC12-001) (City Wide)

Recommendation:

That the correspondence to the Federal Government regarding the cancellation of Remembrance Day Services at the Federal Building, 55 Bay St. North in Hamilton, attached as Appendix A to Report HVC12-001, be approved for mailing under the signature of the Chair of the Hamilton Veterans Committee.

Background:

It has been an annual tradition, in the Federal government offices in Hamilton, during the week leading up to Remembrance Day, to host a gathering to honour veterans. This event, held in the building lobby, has all the refreshments donated and thus has no cost to Veteran Affairs Canada.

In late October 2011 the Hamilton Veterans Committee were informed that this annual tradition was to be cancelled. The reason tendered for this decision was apparently due to a policy change that prevented the office from arranging any events and restricts them to only supporting events organized by others.

Analysis/Rationale:

The Hamilton Veterans Committee advises Council on all matters affecting the Veterans of the City of Hamilton and acts as a liaison between the City and its Veterans.

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The Federal government's policy change has had a profound effect on how veterans in Hamilton feel valued. The Hamilton Veterans Committee is well aware of the pressures of fiscal restraint however still believe this small, inexpensive form of appreciation organized by representatives of the Canadian government is needed and worthwhile.



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March 14, 2012

Honourable Steven Blaney
Minister of Veterans Affairs
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Blaney:

It is with a great deal of disappointment and regret that we write this letter.

Recently, we, as representatives of the Hamilton Veterans Committee were informed that the annual tradition of a major event to honour veterans, held in the Federal government offices in Hamilton during the week leading up to Remembrance Day was to be cancelled. The reason tendered for this decision was apparently due to a policy change that prevented the office from arranging any events and restricts them to only supporting events organized by others.

This policy change sends a very disappointing message to Canadian veterans and we believe the Canadian public in general. Well aware of the pressures of fiscal restraint we still strongly believe this event is a needed and worthwhile event of very little expense for a very valuable purpose and recognition.

The military is not simply a job. It is not only a form of employment with wages and benefits; it is not just a paper trail. It is a profound commitment to country and traditions that goes beyond a simple salary. It is an attitude, lifestyle, and point of pride that stretches years past those of actual service. It also comes with an expectation. That in dedicating your life, or a portion of it, to your country and its government, that your government will show its appreciation for that service.

This, what may appear as a simple change in policy, has had a very profound effect on how veterans of this community feel valued. The removal of this very small gesture was sorely missed this year. Partially due to the fact, that it had been around for so long. And more so because it was in fact, a small inexpensive form of appreciation, organized by representatives of our government.

We had hoped that the present government's apparent appreciation for the military, as shown by its expenditures and other efforts, were a new sign of the times. We did not expect however, that this appreciation would so abruptly end; simply as a mere cost cutting measure, just because a soldier, sailor or airman left active service.

The year 2011 has proven to be a very confusing year in regards to the direction the Canadian government is headed in regards to the Canadian military and veterans affairs.

The ending of our country's combat mission in Afghanistan this year has placed the military and those associated with it firmly in the public's thoughts and minds. The expenditure of millions of dollars on items such as replacement fighter jets and the reflagging of the Air Force and Navy back to the Royal Canadian Air Force and the Royal Canadian Navy leads us to believe that the respect and esteem for those that choose to wear the uniform(s) of Canada is a priority to our government.

The global and Canadian economies have also been front and centre in the public and government's eye. It is understandable that in these harsh financial times that all levels of government should attempt to reel in its costs and show some of the restraint that all of us must, until the economy improves. While most measures being implemented are not only needed, they are also generally appreciated. However, this not the case with all policies.

While the argument of employee wages is perhaps a valid issue, the small amount of time spent in the organizing and attending of this event went an enormously long way in showing that a veteran's efforts, sacrifices and time spent in the service of his country, was appreciated.

Surely the activities of the employees of Veterans Affairs extends beyond that of simply pushing paperwork and merely "appearing" to be interested in the issues of veterans.

John M. Clarke
Chair
Hamilton Veterans Committee