



Veterans Affairs
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Anciens Combattants
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Speaking notes for
THE HONOURABLE

Notes d'allocution de
L'HONORABLE

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Canada

Mr. Chair, members of the Committee, it's an honour to be back here at your Committee. It was only a few days after my last appearance that we were all sent home.

I want to thank all of you for all of the work you've done over the past few months advocating for our Veterans and their families.

Mr. Chair, Veterans' Week just started yesterday.

So I think it's fitting that I'm here today, talking about how much our Veterans mean to us, at a time when we honour those who have served Canada in times of war, military conflict and peace.

Let me first say that over the past eight months, my department has been working to make sure Veterans and their families keep receiving the services and benefits they count on.

I've personally spoken with many of them about how they're experiencing the pandemic and about the support the department can provide.

My message has been this: we're here for you, as we've always been and as we always will be.

The employees of Veterans Affairs Canada have come through delivering services and financial benefits to Veterans and their families while working from home.

Veterans are a priority for our Government.

You've heard me say this every time I've sat here.

That's because I'll use every chance I get to make sure the past and present members of Canada's military know how grateful we are for their service and their sacrifice.

And our Government is taking action to make sure Canada's Veterans are well-served and well-supported.

The 2020-2021 Main Estimates and Supplementary Estimates are an example of that.

The \$5.4 billion in these estimates represents a 19 percent increase over the Main Estimates from last year.

That is approximately 800M more that we're putting directly into the well-being of our Veterans.

It's money for educational opportunities and career transition services, tax-free benefits for caregivers, and services for families.

It's money, Mr. Chair, that will make a big difference in the lives of our Veterans and their families.

But for this to happen, we also have to do better on service delivery.

The backlog is unacceptable. That's why I made it my top priority when I became Minister of Veterans Affairs, and ***directed*** the department to make it their top priority, as well.

This past June, we introduced a strategy to reduce wait times for Veterans. It includes overhauling how teams are organized, making better use of technology and reducing the time it takes to make decisions.

In July, we announced a nearly \$200 million investment to address the backlog. This means keeping 168 disability adjudicators hired through Budget 2018, and hiring an additional 350 employees dedicated to further reducing wait times.

According to the PBO's report, these new hires will have a significant impact on reducing the backlog.

The decision-making process on benefits and programs has been streamlined so less complex cases can move through the system faster—allowing more time to tackle very complex, multi-condition types of claims.

It is our top priority, and we will not stop until the backlog is under control.

It's also worth pointing out Mr. Chair, that in Bill C-4 the government included \$20 million for a Veterans Organizations Emergency Support Fund.

The Fund will provide organizations with the resources they need to keep operating and supporting the Veteran community as we deal with the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I also encourage all Canadians to support their local Legions and to support the Annual Poppy Campaign.

Ceremonies taking place across the country next week will look different this year but we all have a role to honour the service and sacrifice of those who've done so much for us.

We're forever grateful to each and every one of our Veterans for their service and sacrifice.

And we'll continue to do everything we can to make sure proper support is available to them.

With that Mr. Chair, I'm happy to take your questions.