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Rachel Blaney, MP for *North Island - Powell River*

As the NDP MP for North Island - Powell River, a riding that also represents the 19 Wing in Comox, and the critic for Veterans Affairs, I hear from Veterans in my riding and across Canada about the challenges they face when navigating a system that consistently prioritizes bureaucracy over care.

I hear repeatedly from Veterans who are tired, overwhelmed, and frustrated by the process. The Liberals and Conservatives continue fighting about who treats Veterans the worst, but they won't talk about how we can do better today. I will continue fighting to ensure Veterans Affairs prioritizes the respect and dignity Veterans and their families deserve.

Veterans have served us honourably. It's time for us to treat them with the same honour.



Rachel Blaney in Question Period

The National Monument to Canada's Mission in Afghanistan

Through my talks with Veterans and their families, it has become clear to me that it is not only vital we recognize the Afghan Veterans for their service, we must also recognize the sacrifices made by their families. The people who serve Canada work hard and practice hard to prepare themselves to do things

most of us could never imagine doing.

The National Monument to Canada's Mission in Afghanistan is to be a place to acknowledge the history of the mission and the sacrifices of those who served. When choosing a monument, it's important to include the voices of those who served and their families. Unfortunately, the process for choosing a monument has lacked clarity and transparency, which is an ongoing concern within the department.

There hasn't been a clear awareness or understanding of how to connect to Veterans directly to obtain their feedback. While the online survey gave people a voice, there was no verification process to ensure the feedback was from people who were Veterans.

We need Veterans Affairs to be a Veteran-centric department. This means clear and direct communication with Veterans, including explaining decisions such as moving rehabilitation services to PCVRS (Partners in Canadian Veterans Rehabilitation Services). We need a system that does not retraumatize Veterans and their families when they attempt to access the services they need.

The monument should, above all, reflect the Veterans from the Mission in Afghanistan. [I spoke in Parliament](#) about the importance of focusing on Veteran-centric services, including ensuring a clear process for the Monument for Canada's Mission in Afghanistan.

December 20, 2023 Emergency ACVA Meeting

I was disappointed that the Conservatives and the Bloc jointly called an emergency ACVA meeting on December 20 to discuss matters relating to the Monument for Canada's Mission in Afghanistan. There was room in the committee schedule before the holiday break to have discussed the issue. This meeting was called for Conservatives political benefit, not to help the Veteran

community. That is why I voted to adjourn the meeting. Please listen to my intervention, [here](#).

Marriage after 60 clause

The Liberals have repeatedly failed to eliminate the “marriage after 60 clause,” which prevents spouses who marry Veterans after the age of 60 from receiving survivor benefits. This clause is unfairly pushing Veterans’ spouses, mostly elderly women, into poverty even in situations where they have cared for their spouses for years. Despite the announcement of a \$150 million Veterans Survivor Fund four years ago, not a single cent has been given to Veteran families.

In November, Minister of National Defence Bill Blair spoke at the Standing Joint Committee for the Scrutiny of Regulations (REGS) to discuss changes to *the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act*. I took this opportunity to ask what was being done with the \$150 million Veterans Survivor Fund, but Minister Blair could not give me a clear answer. Later, [I posed this same question to Veterans Affairs Minister Ginette Pepitpas Taylor during Question Period](#). Veterans’ spouses deserve survivor pensions, and getting rid of the golddigger clause will remain among my top priorities in 2024.



Rachel with Rear-Admiral (Ret'd) Hon. Rebecca Patterson and Dr. Karen Breck,
Major (Ret'd)

Women Veterans

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA) study on the experience of women Veterans

We have recently concluded the witness testimony phase of the Standing

Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA) study on the experience of women Veterans. I was proud to have initiated this study, which was the first of its kind in Parliament. The study involved 22 meetings in which we heard from approximately 90 witnesses. It was vital for better outcomes among women Veterans that the committee heard from researchers, Veterans Affairs officials and women Veterans themselves to learn about the mistreatment of women who served in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). In the new year, the study will enter its report deliberation phase as the committee will decide upon recommendations to submit to Parliament.



Meeting Madeline Landry, the widow of a Veteran, impacted by the Golddigger clause

Merlo Davidson class action settlement

Women RCMP Veterans suffered years of appalling sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and professional mistreatment. Many came forward to report what Justice Bastarache described as “shocking levels of violence.” While many women received settlement payments, these were then subjected to disability pension clawbacks by VAC, despite all parties involved understanding that these clawbacks would not happen. This process [retraumatized many women](#) and prevented many more from reporting their experience of harassment, discrimination and mistreatment.

I have fought continuously to stop these disability pension deductions and to ensure these women receive justice for their horrifying treatment. After writing a letter and raising the issue in Question Period earlier in 2023, [I questioned Minister of Veterans Affairs Ginette Petitpas Taylor](#) and her Deputy, Paul Ledwell, about the lack of action on the VAC Ombudsperson’s recommendations concerning the settlement.

Minister Petitpas Taylor has reported that the money that was taken is being returned and the clawbacks will stop. This is a victory for all RCMP women!



Rachel with Minister Ginette Pepitpas Taylor

Sex-specific injuries and illnesses

Women Veterans continue to call on VAC to take action to identify, prevent, and communicate sex-specific illnesses and injuries in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). [I asked the Minister and the Deputy Ministers about their actions on this issue](#), what trends they're seeing specifically around women and sex-

specific illnesses, and what the department is doing to ensure women's reproductive health is considered in VAC's health coverage.

Survivors of sexual misconduct bill

In November, I [seconded NDP MP Lindsay Mathyssen's two private member's bills](#) to implement crucial changes to help survivors of sexual misconduct. Those bills would establish an independent Office of the Ombud that would report to Parliament and amend the National Defence Act to remove the military's jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute sexual offences under the criminal code.

These bills will implement key recommendations from Justice Arbour's report that the Liberals have not yet taken action on.

Headstone Corrected

I am very happy that my office could assist the family of Mr. Fred Woodman to correct an error on his headstone, after they had waited two years without any support from VAC. Mr. Woodman's family has been informed that the headstone design will be amended in the construction season of 2024. All of our fallen Veterans deserve to rest in peace and honour, and I will always ensure that Veteran families can comfortably mourn and remember their lost loved ones.

As always, I want to hear from you. Please email me at Rachel.Blaney@parl.gc.ca with your concerns and priorities so I can set my critic agenda for the spring.

Sincerely,



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North Island - Powell River



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