

## Shameful treatment of Canada's veterans

Dear editor:

It is now abundantly clear that the care provided to our veterans, who stood ready to give their all for our country, has been shameful under Minister Julian Fantino.

The Conservative government claims its cuts to the Veterans Affairs Department were to the 'back office' and did not affect front line services.

Yet nearly a quarter of the department's staff - nearly one thousand people - have been eliminated; the vast majority coming from branches that support disability benefits, pensions, health and rehabilitation. Nine specialized veterans service centres were closed. Over a billion dollars in veterans programming was approved by Parliament, but left unspent by the Conservative government in recent years. Management was given bonuses not for better treatment, but for slashing services and staff.

It's no surprise that such reductions stymied veterans' access to critically needed services. According to the Auditor General, many with mental health issues had to wait months, even years to get the psychological help they need.

On top of that, the government has failed to hire the mental health personnel for those serving in the Forces today that it committed to years ago.

Delayed and denying mental health services has all too tragic consequences, up to and including suicide, which claimed the lives of more Canadian Forces personnel than the conflict in Afghanistan, during the same time period.

Instead of addressing these challenges head on, Minister Fantino left the country. Instead of allowing the situation to be fully considered in the Veteran Affairs Committee, the government shut it down.

At a private company, negligence on this scale would cause management to be sacked. It's high time that the Prime Minister wake up, fire this incompetent Minister and start giving our veterans nothing less than the best of care and support from a grateful nation.

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