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Ottawa Journal ? Supporting our Veterans

We owe a huge debt to our Veterans. They have proudly and loyally served our country. They've also made tremendous sacrifices to ensure we may continue to enjoy the peace and freedoms we have in Canada. They've risked their lives to bring stability to war-torn countries around the world. We, as Canadians, deeply appreciate the sacrifices our Veterans have made on our behalf and our Government will always recognize and honour their contributions by continuing to provide practical support to these outstanding men and women.

Our Government has continued to make supporting Canadian Veterans a priority with nearly $5 billion in increased investment since coming into office, including doubling the Last Post and Burial Fund and increasing the compensation available for seriously injured Veterans.

Economic Action Plan 2014 proposes $108.2 million over three years to expand eligibility for the Funeral and Burial Program, to ensure that modern-day Veterans of modest means have access to a dignified funeral and burial. Changes to this program that were announced last year increased the funeral services reimbursement rate to $7,376 and simplified its administration.

Our Government has continued to build on existing initiatives that assist Canadian Veterans, such as the Hire a Veteran program and the Helmets to Hardhats program, by successfully partnering with private sector companies and industry leaders. We introduced the Veterans Hiring Act on March 04, 2014, to ensure more of Canada's men and women in uniform have access to meaningful careers when their military service to Canada has ended. This Bill gives Canadian Armed Forces personnel and honourably-released Veterans better access to openings within the federal public sector. Such support for building meaningful second careers is a key part of a successful transition to civilian life for Canada's Veterans.

Another example of Government's support for Canadian Veterans is the launch of the Psychiatric Service Dog Pilot Project, to study the use of psychiatric service dogs to help Veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In September 2013, Veterans Affairs Canada commissioned the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research to collect and evaluate the existing research on psychiatric service dogs to determine the next steps needed to create a Canadian approach. The results revealed that a pilot project was the appropriate step forward. Veterans Affairs Canada is funding this two-and-a-half-year project to examine the impact of the use of psychiatric service dogs in assisting Veterans with PTSD. It will also provide up to $500,000 in research and treatment benefits for the pilot project. The goal is to have up to 50 veterans, who are in receipt of a disability benefit for PTSD and have approval from their mental health professional, participate in the project.

Canada's Veterans can count on our Government's support through practical and efficient programs that respond to their needs. They've bravely and loyally dedicated themselves to serving our country and they can expect that same loyalty from our Government. We will always stand by them as they've stood by Canada.

By David Tilson, MP