

RSA Questions

1 War Disablement Pension rates

Notwithstanding changes to the general social security environment over the years, would your party agree at least in principle that the current War Pension Rates need once again to be adjusted to a “deemed to be fair” level relative to the average wage?

In September 2007 this Labour-led government directed the Law Commission to undertake a review of the War Pension Act 1954. In July 2008 the Law Commission produced a comprehensive discussion paper entitled ‘Towards a new Veteran’s entitlement Scheme: A discussion paper on a review of the War Pensions Act 1954’. Submissions are being taken until 28 November 2008, at which point the Commission will produce a final report to be tabled in the House of Representatives.

The Labour-led government is committed to ensuring that the care and services we provide to veterans is of the highest possible standard, and the legislation which underpins this effort needs to reflect the changing face of our veterans' population and take a more holistic approach to the welfare of our veterans.

The overall rate of the War Disablement Pension is an issue that is being examined as part of the review and rewrite of the War Pension Act, currently being undertaken by the Law Commission.

Would your party keep previous Government promises of regular indexation?

Yes, Labour reintroduced CPI indexing after it was cut by the National government in the 90s. When it was reintroduced it resulted in a substantial increase in the level of War Disablement Pension, and now indexation is carried out on an annual basis by this government.

2 ACC and an Equitable Basis

Does your party agree that all veterans with attributable conditions should be treated in the same way regarding compensatory payments for these conditions?

Agree that a good starting point would be entitlements equivalent to those under ACC?

Agree also that veterans should receive those ACC-level entitlements plus a Veteran’s increment?

The relationship between ACC and the War Disablement Pension is also an issue that is being examined as part of the Review and rewrite of the War Pensions Act. The Law Commission has stated that the Act does not adequately take into account that some Veterans will qualify for ACC while others will not.

Labour is committed to ensuring that any compensation scheme for veterans is as fair and equitable as possible. We look forward to receiving advice from the Commission on these issues.

3 Ex-gratia payments

Does your party agree with the principle that Veterans should be paid a lump sum commensurate with the ACC total impairment scale as well as their periodic War Disablement pension payments?

This is an issue that is within the scope of the Law Commission review of the legislation. Veterans should make submissions to the Law Commission. Labour looks forward to receiving advice from the Commission on these issues.

Would your party include the two cancers prostate and lung as qualifying for ex-gratia lump sum payment conditions as per the MoU? (This applies specifically and only for Vietnam Veterans exposed to Agent Orange and the toxic environment encountered in Vietnam.)

Ministers and governments need to rely on expert advice when dealing with matters such as these. Ministers have been guided by the United States Academy of Science Institute of Medicine (IOM) list. The IOM is a non-profit organisation created specifically to offer science-based advice on all aspects of biomedical science, medicine, and health. It is the acknowledged leader in this field. The Institute works outside the framework of government to ensure scientifically informed analysis and independent guidance. It provides unbiased, evidence-based, and authoritative information and advice concerning health and science. The United States, Canada, and Australia all take their guidance from the IOM.

If the science in the future is able to find a link between Agent Orange and particular forms of cancer, and it is placed on the IOM presumptive list, New Zealand would immediately provide the enhanced support that would follow from this.

The government is in the process of making arrangements for the establishment of the expert panel provided for in the MoU with Vietnam Veterans signed by the Labour-led government in 2006. The panel will comprise medical and other experts convened to consider relevant medical research and to make recommendations to government also. It is an issue that the expert panel could consider.

4 Tax paid by Vietnam Veterans

Would your party support a project to determine the historical facts in this matter once and for all?

If the result shows that a Vietnam Cohort was not treated fairly in accord with precedent, would your party support the making of a generic payment of \$8000 to each Vietnam veteran (including estates) in line with the JWG's recommendation?

The government's position on a universal tax refund to all Vietnam veterans was clear from the outset. From the 1950s, veterans from other conflicts have not been afforded such reparation. The decision not to designate South Vietnam an operational area was a decision taken by the government of the day. While many veterans disagree with that decision, the fact remains that no operational commitment since the Vietnam War has been treated any differently with respect to the payment of income tax.

The MOU focuses on providing assistance to veterans and their families whose health has been damaged by exposure to a toxic environment. This is clearly justified. What made the Vietnam War exceptional was the indiscriminate use of chemical agents, and the long-term impact of that use on many of those who served there. The Select Committee did not recommend nor did the government ever agree during the Joint Working Group process that universal payments were appropriate.

5 Access to the Veteran's Pension

Does your party agree that to require a veteran to have a war disablement pension of 70% or more before he or she qualifies for a Veteran's Pension is discriminatory; and that unlike NZ Super it implies a compensatory element in the Veterans Pension?

Would your party agree with the RNZRSA that all veterans on obtaining the age of 65 should automatically qualify for the veteran's pension in place of NZ Super?

The role and structure of the Veterans Pension, as well as its relationship with New Zealand Superannuation is being examined in the War Pension Act review and rewrite. Labour looks forward to receiving advice from the Law Commission on this issue.

6 Support to the RNZRSA Welfare infrastructure

Does your party agree the need for assistance to be given to the RNZRSA for its welfare support work to the 60,000 veterans of the nation, and their families, as a cost effective NGO service provider?

Would your party provide annual funding on an on-going basis of an appropriate sum?

Labour absolutely recognises the need for Veterans to have access to a well organised welfare network. In Budget 2008, the Labour-led government gave \$1m to support the RNZRSA Welfare infrastructure. This funding has been spread across four years, a decision this government is fully supportive of. Labour will be interested to see the improvements that are achieved and will take this into consideration when assessing the need for on-going funding.

7 A Medal for Service to the Nation

Would your party support the award of a medal recognising non-operational service in the NZDF since World War 2 covering Regulars, Territorials and CMT/SMT personnel?

The Government's view is that a blanket award – whether for three months' or for four or six years' service – is not the optimal means of addressing outstanding medallic grievances relating to historic non-operational military service. The Government does, however, recognise that some specific, historic non-operational service may warrant medallic recognition. Accordingly, the New Zealand Defence Force is to review historic non-operational military service to determine if any such service, including conscripted military service under the Compulsory Military Training

and National Service schemes, merits medallic recognition.

This review is consistent with the medallic initiatives which have been undertaken by the Government since 1992, and which have systematically addressed historic medallic grievances relating to operational and special service. This approach has seen careful consideration given to the necessity and desirability of instituting any new award, and the effect which it might have on existing New Zealand military awards.

The New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF), in consultation with the RNZRSA, is currently drafting the terms of reference for the forthcoming review. It is anticipated that the review will take approximately nine months to complete. During the review relevant veterans' organisations will be consulted.

8 Medals Heritage

Would your party support the strengthening of the criteria to prevent the sale or disposal overseas of Orders, Decorations and Medals awarded to New Zealanders?

Under current legislation there is provision under s22 of the Protected Objects Act 1975, for the Governor-General to specify that medals which would otherwise fall outside of the Act's scope because they are less than 50 years old, but which hold special significance, to be given protection.

9 Defence Policy

Would your party support the proposition that our defence policy leans too heavily upon our friends and allies to provide combat capability?

Labour believes that our armed forces are very well respected internationally and we work closely with our friends and allies. We do not support the proposition that we rely too heavily on others. New Zealand defence forces are highly valued internationally for their professionalism and ability to operate throughout diverse areas and amongst diverse peoples. Labour remains committed to rebuilding our defence forces to meet New Zealand's needs in the 21st century. We have actively and successfully recruited defence force personal, not just to maintain numbers but to rebuild and grow the Defence Force and as such the defence force is at its highest number of staff at 13,889, since 2001. Labour has committed New Zealand to an independent defence policy which reflects our commitment to be a good international citizen.

10 Veterans Homes and Hospitals

Would your party agree that the current qualified and restrictive loans should be converted to grants? (Among other things this would erase the discriminatory cut off at World War II.)

It is not current government policy to fund retirement homes for capital works, which are what these loans supported. The assistance that has been provided to the homes by the government has been given on the basis that the government of the day wished to take account of the service given by the residents of the homes.

If government was to fund veteran's homes, consideration would also need to be given to the numerous requests that not-for-profit organisations make to the Ministry of Health for capital works funding for other retirement homes.

Many veterans do not become residents in veterans homes and hospitals. Many choose private residential care facilities and some remain in their own homes. Labour is committed to the fair and equitable treatment of all veterans.

Would your party support the reinstatement of regular veterans' residential support payments to the five homes and accredit their purpose as providing special services to veterans?

This government provides funding through the Ministry of Health to Veterans homes through the residential care subsidy. In addition Veterans Affairs New Zealand provides funding through an attendants allowance for residents with high needs care.