



**THE DOMINION
INSTITUTE**

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News Release

Monday, November 6, 6:00 AM

THE DOMINION INSTITUTE CALLS FOR STATE FUNERAL FOR LAST WORLD WAR I VETERAN

Toronto, Ontario – The Dominion Institute is calling on Prime Minister Stephen Harper to offer the family of the last Great War veteran resident in Canada a full State Funeral. As of today, the Institute is collecting signatures on an online petition (accessible at <http://www.dominion.ca/petition/>) which it will present to the federal government in the weeks following Remembrance Day, 2006.

Currently, only three veterans of First World War remain – Lloyd Clemett (106 years of age), John Babcock (106 years of age) and Dwight Wilson (105 years of age). These three men constitute Canada's only living link to the sacrifices and triumphs of the more than half million Canadians who served under arms between 1914 and 1918 and the more than 60,000 who died in the Great War.

"A national gesture needs to be made to mark this watershed moment," said Rudyard Griffiths, Executive Director of The Dominion Institute. "If there ever was a time for our nation to be bold and generous in the commemoration of our history, traditions, and values, surely the passing of our last Great War veteran is that moment."

Surveys undertaken by the Dominion Institute reveal that Canadians' knowledge of the First World War is fading rapidly with barely a third of our fellow citizens can name the battle of Vimy Ridge as a key Canadian victory in the First World War. Polls also show that Canadians feel that more effort should be made to keep the memories and sacrifices of our Great War veterans alive.

The Dominion Institute is making its call for a State Funeral on behalf of the veterans who volunteer with its Memory Project. The Memory Project Speakers' Bureau consists of 1,500 veteran volunteers who have visited with over 300,000 young people since 2001. The Institute conducted an informal survey of this group last month and found that fully 76% supported providing a State Funeral to the family of the Last Great War veteran resident in Canada.

For more information on the Memory Project visit www.thememoryproject.com.

For more information on this release contact:

Rudyard Griffiths
Executive Director
Phone: 416-368-9627

Email: rudyard@dominion.ca

(turn over for background information)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The following is the edited text of a comment essay by the Dominion Institute published in the Globe and Mail on Monday November, 6.

Only three veterans of First World War remain. They are Lloyd Clemett (106 years of age), John Babcock (also 106 years of age) and Dwight Wilson (105 years of age).

Polls undertaken by the Dominion Institute reveal, barely a third of our fellow citizens can name the battle of Vimy Ridge as a key Canadian victory in the First World War, even when the answer is hinted at in the question. One in four respondents thought Douglas Macarthur, not Sir Arthur Currie, was a great Canadian general in World War One; a result that reveals a stunning lack of awareness of both chronology and nationality. Equally disconcerting, less than half of 18 to 24 year olds surveyed were familiar with Capitan John McRae's immortal (or maybe not) war poem, *In Flanders Fields*.

Why do we seem doomed to forget a war that is as important to understanding Canada's journey from colony to nation state as, say, the American Revolution is to the history of the United States?

From the Great War onwards, it has been the veterans, more than anyone else, who have ensured the country understood the link between our military heritage and hard-won nationhood. Through their once million-strong national associations, such as the Royal Canadian Legion, annual Vimy dinners, overseas pilgrimages, and unremitting volunteer work, veterans have kept the traditions of Remembrance alive in communities large and small.

Now, not only are the Great War veterans disappearing, but their sons and daughters who served in the Second World War are, on average, 86 years of age. Of these 200,000 veterans alive today, more than five hundred pass on each week; an attrition rate greater than during the War itself.

The difficult truth is that the entire history of Canada's participation in the wars of the 20th century, especially the Great War, is rapidly slipping out of the realm of lived experience and into the fuzzy world of second- and third-hand memories, to be passed along, or not, to the next generation.

A national gesture needs to be made to mark this watershed moment.

The Dominion Institute is calling on Primer Minister Stephen Harper to offer the family of the last Great War veteran resident in Canada a full State Funeral. For a nation in urgent need of renewing the commitment it made at the end of the Great War to "never forget", a State Funeral would allow Canadians to come together to honour those who died, and accept, on their behalf, the responsibly to keep their memories alive.

Detractors will say that State Funerals are only for Governors General and Prime Ministers, or that they are designed to commemorate the life of an individual and not an event such as the Great War.

We say for once let's cast off the usual Canadian timidity and understatement when it comes to celebrating our past. If there ever was a time for our nation to be bold and generous in the commemoration of our history, traditions, and values, surely the passing of our last Great War veteran is that moment.

