

# National President addresses ACT State Congress

**Opening the ACT State Branch Congress, RSL National President Major-General Bill Crews said:**

*It is always a pleasure to be able to address the Congress of my home state. Thank you for inviting me to join you all again and, on this occasion, according me the honour of opening proceedings.*

*I am often asked which is the best Congress to attend. My evasive answer is that they are all wonderful experiences and each one quite different. There are, however, some things in common with all of our state congresses:*

- the considerable effort put into their organisation by the state branch executive and staff and, in most of the states, the hosting sub-branch;
- the wonderful hospitality we all enjoy; and
- the fellowship which is an essential ingredient in all the League's gatherings: renewing friendships and making new friends; catching up since we last met; sharing in the common bond we have of Defence Force service.

*This morning [June 12], some of us gathered at the Australian War Memorial to pay our respects to all Australians who have lost their lives in the service of our nation or subsequently.*

*It was a brief but moving ceremony so central to our core purpose as an organisation. We are fortunate in Canberra that we have, in addition to local memorials, the Australian War Memorial and the commemorative avenue, ANZAC Parade. In all respects, we serve as custodians of these great national institutions and memorials*

*Of course, our principal purposes in meeting remain:*

- receiving reports from our office bearers and holding those we elect to account;
- receiving briefings on matters of interest to us; and
- discussing the issues of concern to us in an effort to improve either our internal management or governance arrangements or our broader range of entitlements.

*Let me say that I am encouraged by the diverse nature of the motions put before this Congress and I feel sure that as you discuss them you will come to a sound consensus about what you might wish to do about them — so it can be a fairly busy day but, above all, let us not be overwhelmed by the busyness of Congress. Most of us here are volunteers but, irrespective, it is quite important that our experience together here at the Hellenic Club is an enjoyable and rewarding one.*

*Have fun; and let us appreciate each other's company and in the process do what we have come here to do on behalf of our sub-branches.*

*Let me now make sure that I do what I have been asked to do this morning, before I move on to my annual report to you.*

*Let me declare this 82nd Annual ACT State Branch Congress Open.*

## ACT Aspects

*If I could reflect briefly, firstly, on our work here in Canberra, I would suggest that the League's principal objects are being well satisfied:*



Major-General Bill Crews, National President, and Lieutenant Colonel John Merrick, Immediate Past President of the ACT State Branch, lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in a ceremony associated with the ACT Congress in June.

- our engagement in commemorative activities remains strong. I continue to be impressed by Woden Valley Sub-Branch's Annual Schools and Peace Ceremony at Eddison Park leading up to ANZAC Day;
- our two Day Clubs offer fantastic support to elderly veterans, widows and others living alone;
- essential welfare and pension work continues under the watchful eye of Arthur Craig and the many other volunteers who give so freely of their time for hospital visitations and the conduct of all too many funerals; and
- while all sub-branches play a key role in supporting local community groups and schools in their areas, I note that Belconnen, Tuggeranong, Woden Valley and Gungahlin Sub-Branches are also listed as Friends of Legacy.

*So let me take this opportunity to thank all of our members in the ACT for your commitment, your time, and your enthusiastic contributions to the many facets of our work.*

## National Issues

*In my report this year I will address only a few of many contemporary issues. If any of you have particular matters you want to discuss, please feel free to bail me up during the day or indeed at a later date if you wish. I am keen to ensure that all our members have a chance to have their concerns raised and a response provided.*

## Veteran Entitlement Framework

*We have come a long way over the last 10 years. The big issues are largely resolved but we still have much to do in working through anomalies, making incremental but meaningful adjustments to some entitlements, and continuing the cultural change towards a focus on rehabilitation and wellness.*

*I commend the Government in its active pursuit of the Veterans' Affairs Policy Platform — a report on which is available from the Minister — and I commend the department on its continuing work to respond to the changing demographics and expectations and reviewing its service-delivery*

*approaches under OneDVA to make further meaningful improvements. This should be a co-operative endeavour, not an adversarial one. It is our aim to ensure that it is.*

*Opportunities for financial largesse over the next few budgets are minimal but it doesn't cost much to explore better ways of doing things, improving relationships between veterans in need and the Department and achieving greater cohesion and cooperation across the wider veteran community.*

*Superannuation: one unresolved issue from our recent budget submissions is that concerning the indexation of military superannuation and, for some, several related superannuation issues.*

*The subject has been studied exhaustively. Proposals, some quite modest, have been recommended. Action has stalled.*

*We can appreciate that until the global financial crisis recedes there is probably little scope to move on this but we should be able to project a future date to resolve this outstanding equity issue.*

*I had put such a proposal forward to Minister Snowdon. There are also some lower-cost options which will recognise the concerns without responding to them in full.*

*Major General Crews said other continuing issues included mental health reviews by Professor Dunt; and the work of pension officers and advocates.*

*Of the Clarke Review, he said representations had been made on all issues: recent British High Court decision on atomic veterans.*

- Pharmaceuticals — funding in the Budget for study;
- Review of MRCA — our submission has been lodged and will be placed on our web site.

*The National President listed as chal-*

## My journey ...

*My journey in the last five and a half years has been fascinating and rewarding. It has not been without difficult moments and disappointments but the overwhelming positive is the opportunity to work with so many great people — veterans, their families, departmental staff and others in the wider community. Offering support to our dedicated volunteers is the richest of rewards and will be one of my fondest memories in the years ahead. A big thank you to all of you for that.*

**Bill Crews**

lenges facing the RSL as:

- the new consultative framework;
- the needs of younger ex-service men and women: one of the four consultative forums being set up by DVA;
- mental health service support and awareness;
- financial pressures on DVA — focus on quality of service and empathy;
- working with other ESOs;
- communications; and
- the needs of carers.

## Conclusions

*He continued:*

*As most of you by now are aware, I have decided not to seek re-election at the National Congress this September. For the sake of the League, national presidents should not hang about longer than five to six years. There is one nominee for the position — Rear Admiral Ken Doolan — and I commend Ken to you and ask you to offer him your full support as you have so generously given me.*

*As this will therefore be my last opportunity to address this State Congress, let me:*

- express to you all my gratitude for the loyalty and support you have given to me and particularly to the work of the League over the past six years;
- thank you for the hospitality and courtesies extended to me during my participation in various sub-branch and State Branch activities; and
- congratulate you on the success of your endeavours here in the ACT in fulfilling the League's objectives and in the contributions you have made individually and collectively to our lives here in the ACT.