

Wreath-laying refusal highlights need for Legion to do more



A Royal Canadian Legion branch's initial refusal to allow a veteran to lay a wreath for nine Afghan war dead shows how out of touch the organization is with the needs of modern day vets, says Toronto civil litigator [Sarah O'Connor](#).

"The Canadian legion isn't supporting veterans like it's supposed to," says O'Connor, principal of [O'Connor Richardson Professional Corporation](#). "More work has to be done."



Canadian armed forces veteran Jamie Keating complained in a Facebook video that a legion branch in Hampton, N.B. charged him \$45 for a wreath and then told him he would not be allowed to lay it during the Remembrance Day ceremony, nor could he have the names of nine fallen Afghan war soldiers read out, reports the [CBC](#).

That decision has since been rescinded, says the CBC story, and the legion branch's president has resigned.

Keating, a one-time Hampton resident says in his Oct. 26 video, which has been viewed more than 366,000 times, that the branch told him it no longer allows veterans to lay wreaths but reserves that honour for members of Parliament and military officers, says a story in the [National Post](#).

He says he complained to the office of the local member of Parliament, prompting a legion official to phone with added reasons for its refusal, namely that he is not a legion member, he no longer lives in Hampton, none of the nine fallen were from the town and "nine names is too many names to be remembered," says the *Post* article.

"This is why I will never walk into a legion again, and this is why most vets do not attend ceremonies," says Keating, who has been diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after serving as a technician with Canada's Disaster Assistance Response Team, the *Post* reports.

O'Connor says she can understand why a small-town branch might want to have a ceremony honouring just local veterans, but she notes that soldiers from all over Canada have made sacrifices.

"Whether you're from New Brunswick or B.C., we're thankful that these people are willing to go and fight," she tells [AdvocateDaily.com](#).

The incident underscores how legion branches have been criticized for not giving Afghan and other recent vets the same recognition as survivors of the Second World War or Korean War, O'Connor says.

"In this case they appear to be caught up in the rules and regulations instead of supporting our veterans, which seems to be in conflict with what the Canadian population as a whole thinks," she says.

O'Connor cites a poll conducted by Historica Canada showing 76 per cent of Canadians questioned would like to see a new monument for soldiers who died in more recent conflicts.

A further example of the Royal Canadian Legion's apparent flawed support for veterans is its opposition to making Remembrance Day an official holiday, as proposed in a private members bill now before Parliament, she says.

[Legion officials](#) have said the change would turn the day into just another holiday while having students in school for Remembrance Day ceremonies strengthens "the impact of the significance of Nov. 11."

Since Keating's video went viral, he posted a second video Nov. 2 in which he says members of the legion's provincial and national executives have reached out to make amends, as have the heads of two other New Brunswick branches. He will now be allowed to lay the wreath at the Hampton service and have the names of nine Afghan war dead read out, [CBC reports](#).

Keating says he has received "thousands of messages" of support, says the *Post* story.

For her part, O'Connor says the growing influence of civilians on legions is understandable, given the shrinking number of veterans. One solution would be to make sure at least one veteran or member of the military is running each branch alongside a civilian, she says.

She adds that this incident shows how much more work needs to be done to remember and help Canadian veterans, whether by providing medical services or helping them access therapy for PTSD.

"The country's duty to them isn't just sending them off," O'Connor says. "It's a lifelong obligation to make sure that they're cared for."