

BROCK'S BANTER: Perspectives on Fear

By Brock Weir

Well, the National Day of Honour has come and gone. What did you do to celebrate veterans who have returned from Afghanistan? If you're like many Canadians, the answer is probably "not much." But again, like many Canadians, if given the opportunity to do so, you probably would have liked to do much more.

Taking the storm-in-a-teacup controversies, such as corporate sponsorship of commemorations in Ottawa, out of the equation, one of the primary criticisms surrounding the National Day of Honour was not whether it was right or justified to do anything which could be construed as "glorifying" war, but whether there was enough lead time to do something truly special.

When the Prime Minister announced plans this March for a unique way to pay tribute to Canada's Afghan veterans, it was a very welcome move.

A regular visitor to the United States at the end of May, often coinciding with their Memorial Day commemorations, I have often thought the way they set aside two separate days at opposite sides of the calendar was a wonderfully practical solution to give everyone their due.

While Canadians mark Remembrance Day on the anniversary of the Armistice on November 11, our neighbours earmark that day as Veterans Day, paying tribute to all the men and women who served in the theatre of war. Their May holiday is, in turn, a time to honour those who sacrificed their own lives for their country.

These differences are a good way to ensure no group overshadows another. Those who went off to war often did so with a common sense of duty and patriotism. Their experiences over there, however, were highly individual.

The National Day of Honour could have been so much more, if only organizers had the time to make it so. Speaking to some of the people working on a fitting tribute at Aurora's Cenotaph on Friday, it seemed clear these were people looking for time and direction from the Federal Government.

Without getting that clarity, they did their very best to bring people together, from local members of government such as Mayor Geoffrey Dawe and members of the Queen's York Rangers to put their best foot forward.

What they were able to pull together at the last minute was remarkable, but if they had more time to get the word out, there might have been more than four or five people there to see it.

Commemorations fared slightly better up in Sutton as the York Regional Police welcomed people to #3 Division to pay tribute to the Queen's York Rangers, battalions serving the York Region area, and members of the York Regional Police who served in the latest theatre of war and providing opportunities for MPs Lois Brown and Peter Van Loan, as well as YRP Chief Eric Joliffe, and Mayors Virginia Hackson (East Gwillimbury) and Rob Grossi (Georgina) to pay their respects.

It was a wonderful ceremony and, as you can see in these pages, Sergeant Jason Kloos paid moving tribute to the people he served with, several of whom were in the audience with their families, as well as those they served with who did not fare so well.

Again, however, participation from other members of the public beyond the friends and loved ones of those who were participating in the ceremony were limited and that was a particular shame. Nevertheless, it was an emotional experience for those who were able to take part in the commemorations.

"I began training for Afghanistan in the summer of 2009 at Canadian Forces Base Petawawa," Sgt. Kloos explained, addressing the audience. "After making the grade, it was time to say goodbye to my family and my hometown of Keswick and board a plane to Kandahar Airfield. It was one of the hardest things I have ever had to do in my life. I was filled with excitement, worry and a little bit of fear of my own future."

Hearing these words spoken so openly and honestly by someone who had the courage to embark on that mission was heartening. It also provided much needed perspective, in my view, on what "fear" actually is, and not in the way it has been used so flippantly by so many people in Aurora over the past several months.

There have been claims (well, one) that Scott Johnston's cartoon lampooning some of the arguments politicians were ostensibly champing at the bit to use against a ward system were "fear mongering" the issue.

Back in March, when debates surrounding the proposed Heritage Conservation District (HCD) for the neighbourhood in the southeast corner of Yonge and Wellington really started to take shape, arguments made against the plan, particularly that it would somehow make the municipality co-owners of your property were branded "fear mongering" by those in favour of the plan.

The "fear factor" has also crept into unfolding Provincial race as well with representatives of the Liberal party "but not the actual Liberal candidate" arguing the PCs and Tim Hudak will "find increasingly creative ways to try and divide Ontario, Ontarians, and

to fear monger and scare people?, particularly when it came to care for seniors.

Arguments trying to underscore fear, invoke fear, and accusing others of doing the same with the intention of underscoring and provoking fear have become increasingly stale arguments which completely detract from the true issues at the table and discount what might be, to some, genuine concerns.

Before invoking the word 'fear' in an argument, take a moment to gain some perspective. It does not always apply to people with opposite or seemingly opposing viewpoints.