



**DOMINION COMMAND
PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE
Saturday, November 23, 2019, 9:00 a.m. ET
(meeting at Legion House)**

File:

In Attendance	Owen Parkhouse	-	Chairman
	Sharon McKeown	-	Vice-Chairman
	Stephen Gallant	-	Member (PEI)
	Nathan Lehr	-	Member (NL & L)
	Kenneth Ouellet	-	Member (QC)
	Chris Strong	-	Member (AB/NWT)
	Nujma Bond	-	Committee Coordinator
	Leah O'Neill	-	Ass't Committee Co-ord.
Dion Edmonds	-	Ass't Committee Co-ord.	
Guest	Bill Chafe	-	Chairman (DEC)

NOTES/ MINUTES

1. Opening

Owen

The meeting began at 9:00 a.m. hours (ET).

- a. Welcome and introductory remarks
- b. Past minutes had been previously reviewed by all members. Review of minutes not required.

2. Review of DEC PR Committee Report

Owen

The specific items within the DEC PR Committee report were discussed within the framework of the Strategic Plan goal of public awareness. See below.

3. Strategic plan alignment: Public awareness

- a. Reputation (Stolen valour/political events/promotion of Remembrance)
- b. Chain of Communications
- c. Sharing of expertise (e.g. Defence and Security committee)
- d. Universal Welcome guide

Stolen Valour

Owen reviewed the recommendation in the PR Committee Report for DEC to consider more immediate consequences related to Stolen Valour.

- Stolen Valour is a focus of the Dominion President's mandate. Nujma shared the video recently produced that features the Dominion President highlighting the grave nature of the offence. Branches should follow the process to address Stolen Valour when it's brought to their attention, however, the consequences of someone convicted of Stolen Valour are left to the discretion of the Branch. The PR Report to DEC recommends discussion about immediate membership consequences for those convicted of the offense under the Criminal Code.
- After viewing the Stolen Valour video, there was discussion around who has access to 'proof of service' records, and what the Legion considers 'proof of service', as not all Veterans under the definition of the Legion have a 'Veteran Service Card.' However the card is just one example of how volunteers should check on whether a person is actually a Veteran.
- There was discussion around how to respond to media when approached about a Stolen Valour claim. As there is potential for a criminal investigation, Nujma noted the best practice is not to comment on specifics to the media until the investigation (both within the Legion and by law enforcement) is complete, and even then, there may be confidential details that cannot be shared.

Action item: Owen will share more on the discussion by DEC on the PR recommendation to establish a more immediate consequence for Stolen Valour.

Political Events

Owen reviewed the recommendation in the PR Committee Report for DEC to develop guidelines for Legion representation and wearing of Legion dress at political events.

- The Legion is an apolitical organization and representatives of the Legion cannot be seen to show endorsement or support for any one political party by participating in a political event in Legion dress. The PR Report to DEC recommends the Legion develop explicit guidelines to outline when and where Legion representatives can and cannot appear in Legion dress. Owen noted that nothing in our By-Laws specifically states whether we can/cannot wear Legion dress at political events.

Promotion of Remembrance

Owen reviewed the recommendation in the PR Committee Report to DEC to discuss additional external ways to share with Canadians how we support the promotion of Remembrance, both financially and creatively. Dion commented that a recommendation was made to DEC for Poppy Funds to financially support further promotion of Remembrance. Committee members discussed Remembrance activities from this past year:

- Some areas anecdotally saw fewer people wearing Poppies this year. However the Supply Department reports that Poppy orders have been essentially consistent year to year over the past decade.

- Committee members noted higher participation from Canadian Forces members in Remembrance activities. Dion noted that Legion Headquarters has been doing more sponsorship, partnership and outreach opportunities with the Forces which may have contributed to their increased involvement with the Legion.
- The Digital Poppy campaign brought in fewer donations this year over last. This may have been attributed to more media last year as the initiative was new in 2018. However, the initiative was no cost to the Legion and generated Poppy Funds.
- Alberta Command had a soft launch of a QR code donation option with their Poppy Boxes in the Calgary area. The launch brought in \$50K, and reflected the increasingly cashless society we must address.
- The online donation option for Dominion Command Poppy Trust Fund at Legion.ca is also a new way for people to give, and has seen \$95K donated to date.
- Committee discussion from this brought forth ideas to support Poppy Campaign promotions, including a printed card to use during the Poppy Campaign to highlight the significance of the Poppy, to hand out during the campaign. Members were informed that the Supply Department has a wide range of campaign promotional items available.

Action item: Nujma to provide Committee with link to Poppy Campaign resources for reference and look at whether additional resources need to be created.

Chain of communications

Owen highlighted the PR Committee's commitment to supporting communications and the need for all levels of the Legion to receive key messaging. The question was posed, how do we strengthen communications across the organization? Leah shared recent statistics on emails sent to Branches and Members that highlight a low participation rate:

- 99% of Branches receive the all branch email to their preferred Branch email address, which is not always an @legion.ca address. Of those, only 50% open the all branch emails, and of those 50% only 30% click through to further information provided. Expected rate for operational branch emails should be in the 90-95% open rate.
- It's notable that only 16% of Branches are opening all branch emails sent to their @legion.ca email address.
- Of the approximately 80,000 member emails on file (current and lapsed members), 64,000 of those emails are for current, paid members. Only 58,000 emails get through to those members, mainly due to a high number of invalid member emails in our database. Of those emails delivered, about 51% of emails are opened.

Members discussed ideas to help push down emails to zones and districts. While it was suggested the Provincial Command Executive Directors can provide Legion Headquarters with email addresses for all zones and districts (and update the addresses as required), there are other options that may be easier to administer. It was

also noted that not all Commands and Branches are using standardized email formats that are specific to a position. This would help ensure new people receive the information they need for their roles. Because of regular volunteer turnover, personal emails addresses are not always the best option for Legion work.

Owen discussed the importance of succession planning, and using a standardized email address to ensure continuity of communications and record keeping as volunteers change within a role. Some Branches are also still operating via paper which is another ongoing challenge.

Action item: Leah will explore member opt-in options to receive all-branch emails, so that those who need or would like the information can receive it directly.

Action item: Leah will look at options to update the Legion.ca site to make the member link more prominent.

Sharing of expertise

Owen brought forward a suggestion that the Defence and Security Committee can provide background information and consult on developing statements when approached by media. Nujma noted that the Committee had offered to provide this expertise during a meeting some time ago, though we first need to determine which topics the Legion is comfortable speaking about publicly when it comes to Defence and Security.

Universal welcome guide

Members were presented the idea of a universal welcome guide for new members though no decision was made on that front. A number of ideas were brought forward in terms of welcoming and recruitment, including:

- Increasing Legion participation at SCAN seminars;
- Legion outreach at recruit schools and on completion of Basic Training;
- Chris suggested developing a 'Battle card' with ideas for Branches to recruit and ways engage new members; it could help direct them in terms of their interest areas and skills as they relate to the organization's needs, and for Veterans, would also speak to them more clearly. *(Like a SWOT analysis: skills, weaknesses, opportunities, threats. It was noted this was also done during the development of the Strategic Plan.)*
- Sharing 'lessons learned' regarding Branch success stories;
- Promoting through local organizations such as putting a brochure in the local "Welcome Wagon" package; Owen noted that saying things like "I would like you to join the Legion" instead of "Have you thought about joining?" - can make people feel welcome and wanted right away.
- Veterans-only coffee; Veterans dinners; and open house meet and greet events.
- Owen highlighted the importance of recognizing that there are different 'types' of volunteers, from an active volunteer who contributes to Branch activities, to a 'supporter' volunteer who contributes through their membership fee but does not

actively participate at the Branch. All types of volunteers are valued, and to engage them we must first understand their perspective and how they want to contribute.

- We discussed the fact that people still aren't getting the message that anyone can join the Legion. We need more effort at all levels to get this across. We also need to make a greater effort to reach Veterans during and after Basic Training – Ken noted that QC has seen some successes in this area.

4. Any other business

All

Don Cherry:

The Legion's statement regarding Don Cherry on the eve of November 11 was discussed. The statement was issued in response to a rapidly escalating situation regarding his opinion and appearance on television, both of which directly implicated The Royal Canadian Legion and the Poppy Campaign. A decision was made by the Dominion President to issue his statement primarily via Facebook. The process to develop and release a statement was expedited because of the need to respond quickly to questions from the public and media. Dion noted the Dominion President retains the authority to make timely decisions when unusual circumstances arise.

Action item: Owen to provide an update to PR Committee Members on the outcome of the DEC discussion on this topic.

The Strategic Plan:

Chris noted The Royal Canadian Legion Strategic Plan overview sheet does not contain specific objectives. Dion noted the detailed plan contains more detail and can be found on the Member Services Website. Owen noted it is important for the Legion to share positive stories that highlight the successes we are having related to the Strategic Plan. Branches and Commands are also encouraged to share their stories with Legion Headquarters. Commands are encouraged to share their newsletters with all other Commands.

Working with Government:

Owen noted the Legion needs to engage more with the Government and with VAC, to strengthen our voice. Nujma said that she does have conversations with the PR representatives in the office of the Minister of Veterans Affairs Canada, as an example of some of the sharing that does currently exist. It may be useful to take current stock at the DEC level, of what other relationships we are currently fostering with government.

Education:

A member shared that Canvet is working on a new project designed to educate about the importance of the Poppy and Remembrance. It was noted it is the role of all sectors of society to share this information (e.g. schools, government, families). Sharon remarked that one of Canada's fastest growing communities, Milton, ON, does a good job of this, and many new residents there wear poppies.

Roundtable highlights:

Ken noted that his call for Poppy Campaign volunteers through the media was very successful. The new QC Veteran plate story has been picked up by media and the number has gone from 9,000 to 27,000 plates. Also Senior National Defense people are facilitating Legion visits with service members, and are helping push the plate and the Legion. Ken would like to see additional information and action regarding the Poppy trademark, especially as it pertains to the white poppy. He will raise his questions with DEC. He noted some concern over the Legion's campaign-related commercials which he felt could show more positive aspects of the Legion.

Nathan was grateful for PR support he received from National Headquarters when he was asked to speak to media about Christmas lights before Remembrance Day.

Stephen noted the banner program they implemented is very successful, with multiple community partners. They also worked with Communities in Bloom to recycle wreaths into Christmas wreaths. Stephen wondered about other recycling ideas or plans at a national level – Nujma shared National Headquarters' current search for biodegradable or alternative materials for both poppies and wreaths. Once a year PEI has a President's reception that helps with recruitment. Owen suggested having a standard week or day for an open house. Maybe we could standardize Legion Week across the country. Stephen also noted that PEI had poor representation from RCMP this year and will be addressing it locally as there did not appear to be a widespread problem across the country, as far as committee participants reported.

Bill thanked the PR Committee for allowing him to sit in on the meeting as an observer. He noted the passion of PR meeting participants. He also noted there are many good things underway, and still much more to be done. He remarked that when it comes to Branch communications it can be challenging sometimes with so many people being volunteers and some Branches operating only through paper. He suggested that on the topic of Veterans self-identifying as a Veteran, he finds it's useful to ask: "Have you ever served in the Forces" rather than asking if they are a Veteran. He says many consider themselves as ex-service members. As far as welcoming members, Bill noted that the bartender is often the first contact and we must ensure such staff are representative of (and knowledgeable about) the Branch and Legion.

7. Next meeting

Owen

The next PR Committee Meeting:

- Date/time: Wednesday, April 1, 2020, 1 pm ET. Agenda to follow.
- Delivered through video conferencing, possibly via "Teams"

8. Adjournment

Owen

Meeting adjourned 11:45 a.m. ET.