

Rethink 9/11 Canada: Ottawa Mayor Against Free Speech?

By [Craig McKee](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Terrorism](#)

Global Research, September 23, 2013

[Truth and Shadows](#) 18 September 2013

Rethink 9/11 ads on Ottawa buses are staying right where they are.

A 2009 Supreme Court of Canada [ruling](#) affirms that the content of transit system ads are protected as free expression under section 2(b) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. (The case involved multiple parties, including the Greater Vancouver Transit Authority, British Columbia Transit, the Canadian Federation of Students, and the B.C. Civil Liberties Association.)

The Rethink 9/11 campaign, sponsored by Architects and Engineers for 9/11 Truth, bypasses the mainstream media and exposes people to the case for 9/11 Truth with the posting of billboards and signs in major cities around the world – on buildings, on top of cabs, in bus shelters, and in subway cars – during the month of September, which coincides with the 12th anniversary of 9/11. Cities involved include New York, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Toronto, Vancouver, London, and Sydney.

The ads ask the question, “Did you know that a 3rd building fell on 9/11?” They are designed to get people asking questions about the evidence, and specifically about the evidence showing that all three towers in New York City were brought down in controlled demolitions.

Objections to the Ottawa ads, which run until the first week of October, were raised both by Mayor Jim Watson and transit commission chair Diane Deans. While Watson has stated publicly that he believes the ads are protected as free speech, he also believes them to be “disrespectful” of the victims of the 9/11 crimes.

Deans, who plans to ask for a review of the city’s ad policy at the next commission meeting (that was to be today, Sept. 18, but the meeting was cancelled), claims the ads are “insensitive.” She also stated that it is a difficult challenge to balance free speech with what is acceptable to the community.

That prompted this response from Rethink 9/11:

“To Councillor Deans and to all who question our sensitivity and legal right to run the ReThink911 ads, we would like to make clear: the ReThink911 coalition includes 9/11 victims’ family members who want nothing more than an accurate and unbiased accounting of the death of their loved ones. To these surviving family members, seeking the truth is the most profound way to honor their loved ones. Your words ignore their search for truth and cause more pain. With regard to our legal right to run these ads, every statement contained in the ad—with the exception of “The evidence might surprise you”—is factually

uncontroversial. If free speech does not protect the right to make factually uncontroversial statements in public, what does it protect? Any effort to remove the ReThink911 ads or curtail free speech on OC Transpo would likely be ruled unconstitutional in a court of law."

Transit commission member Blair Crew, who is a criminal defence attorney and a civil libertarian, said in an interview that he is not offended by the ads and certainly believes they deserve protection as free speech. (Crew is one of four "citizen" members who are appointed – the rest of the commission is made up of elected councillors.)

"I love the X-Files," he says. "There's always the interest in a good conspiracy theory although most of them don't go anywhere."

He added that there are "conspiracy theories" about whether the U.S. government knew in advance about the attack on Pearl Harbor and whether it was involved in the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Unlike 9/11, he says, these subjects don't offend people easily because the events happened so long ago.

"It's only because this one is so much more recent in time, and it affected so many more people, but I don't see anything in the ads themselves that I find disrespectful, and merely suggesting an alternative theory does not for me do that by itself."

Crew was the only member of the commission who agreed to be interviewed for this article. All commission members were contacted, including Watson and Deans.

Lawyer Chris Sanderson, who represented the B.C. Civil Liberties Association in the 2009 case, said in an interview that the Supreme Court decision is certainly relevant to the issue of whether Ottawa has the legal right to restrict ads or to have them removed altogether.

"Certainly that decision is relevant to the kinds of rules they can and cannot make to restrict speech," he said. "When it's public space, government ought not to be able to control the content of the expression in that space."

Media reaction to the issue has been muted but still predictably negative. The most hysterical reaction came from the Canadian edition of the *Huffington Post*, which published an [article](#) stating that the ads had prompted "widespread outrage." Apparently, their idea of widespread outrage is two people they interviewed and three snarky tweets.

Ted Walter, who is managing the Rethink 9/11 campaign, said in an interview that the concerns raised by Watson and Deans are actually helpful for the awareness-raising effort, because they have prompted a dialogue not only about whether these ads should be allowed but also about their content.

"Our job is to shift the discussion onto the substance," he says.

Walter says that Rethink 9/11 has plans in January to post more ads, this time seeking market saturation in New York, Washington D.C., and Toronto.

A U.S. opinion poll commissioned by Rethink has already found that 46% of those shown video of the destruction of Building 7 believe it came as a result of a controlled demolition. That means that nearly half of those polled do not accept the government's account of what happened. Walter says the Ottawa controversy has also prompted Rethink 9/11 to embark on a poll of Canadians on the same subject.

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Articles by: [Craig McKee](#)

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