

Should Remembrance Day be made a 'legal' holiday? Veterans' groups are divided

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Should Remembrance Day be made a “legal” holiday? Ontario New Democrat MP Dan Harris thinks so, but his private member’s bill won’t likely make it through the House of Commons and the Senate before the summer, [The Canadian Press reports](#)

[\[http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/bill-to-make-nov-11-legal-holiday-stalled-in-parliament-unlikely-to-survive/article24148878/\]](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/bill-to-make-nov-11-legal-holiday-stalled-in-parliament-unlikely-to-survive/article24148878/).

Conservative MP Rick Dykstra told the news agency that the government has received “significant push back” from some prominent veterans’ groups.

All but four provinces currently make Remembrance Day a statutory holiday. Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba and Nova Scotia do not.

Harris hopes his bill would make them change their minds.

Not all veterans’ organizations oppose the idea. As the debate shows, there are strong cases to be made by both sides about the best way to honour those who have served come Nov. 11.

‘The way it stands now, it’s working’

“We’re not in favour of the private member’s bill,” says Tom Eagles, Dominion President of the Royal Canadian Legion. “We feel the best way to recognize Remembrance Day is [for it] to just be Remembrance Day.”

If it were to become a national holiday, the Legion worries that many people would treat it as a time to kick back rather than a day to pay respectful tribute to all those who have served.

“The way it stands now, it’s working. It’s working very well,” Eagles says. “We’re seeing increased numbers out to the cenotaph on Nov. 11.”

It’s very important to the Legion that young people in Canada continue to participate in Remembrance Day services and learn about the day in school, something they might not do if it were to become a national holiday, Eagles says.

“I don’t see it broken, so why are we trying to fix it?” he says.

‘It has to be done’

“We have a situation now where we can put forward Remembrance Day as equal to all other holidays,” says Michael Blais, president and founder of Canadian Veterans Advocacy, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for Canadian veterans. “It has to be done.”

Making Remembrance Day a statutory holiday is an appropriate gesture of respect toward veterans, Blais says.

He disagrees with the Legion that people would treat it as a day off school or work like any other.

“There’s no doubt in my mind that people will respond to Remembrance Day as it should be,” he says.

Veterans’ groups could “engage the nation” better if Remembrance Day were a statutory holiday, Blais says.

“In the morning we attend memorial services, we pay respect to the dead. But after we have placed our poppy, then we celebrate the living,” he says. That might include various community events attended by veterans, and advertisements from Veterans Affairs Canada focused on “the spirit of the nation and sacrifice.”

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