

Bill to make Remembrance Day a national holiday inches closer to law

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OTTAWA -- A New Democrat MP's bid to make Remembrance Day a national statutory holiday is now one step closer to reality.

Bill C-597, which would amend the Holidays Act to make Remembrance Day a statutory day off like Christmas or Canada Day, passed a second-reading vote in the House of Commons on Wednesday by a margin of 258 to 2.

The legislation, introduced by New Democrat MP Dan Harris, now moves to the Commons heritage committee for further study before coming back to the Commons for a final vote.

Ultimately, however, it would be up to the individual provinces where Nov. 11 is currently not a holiday -- Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and Manitoba, representing slightly more than half the country's working population -- to change their individual labour codes.

Harris said he's confident the measure will become law, particularly in light of the recent deaths of two Canadian soldiers -- tragic attacks that remain fresh in the minds of Canada's federal parliamentarians.

"On the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War and given recent tragic events, I think there's some momentum in that direction," Harris said.

Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent was killed Oct. 20 in Quebec when he was hit by a car driven by a man with jihadist sympathies. Two days later, Cpl. Nathan Cirillo was gunned down while standing guard at the National War Memorial.

The lingering memory of the attacks is expected to spill over into a collective show of mourning during Remembrance Day services across the country on Tuesday, and that's helping his cause in both the Commons and the Senate, Harris said.

Whether Canadians get a paid day off on Nov. 11 depends on where in the country they live and who they work for. Federal workers get a holiday, as do workers in the three territories and six provinces: Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia.

Conservative MP Erin O'Toole, a former Canadian Forces helicopter navigator, spoke on behalf of the government during debate on the bill in the Commons, and said the Tories will support it once it's amended at committee.

Harris said it's important to remember Canada's veterans "for protecting and fighting for the freedoms we value today."

He predicted that making Remembrance Day a national statutory holiday will result in more people attending remembrance services.

Remembrance Day was first marked in 1919 as the one-year anniversary of the armistice signing that ended the First World War.

The bill needs to be passed before the next election, scheduled for October, in order to be in force for Nov. 11, 2015.

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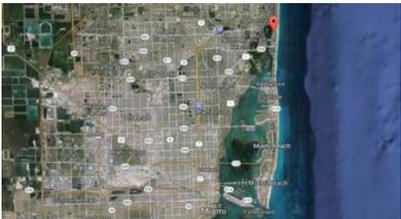
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