

Ottawa panel wants to stop lowering flag for Vimy Ridge, police, women and workers

BILL CURRY
FROM TUESDAY'S GLOBE AND MAIL
APRIL 1, 2008 AT 2:46 AM EDT

OTTAWA — A federal advisory panel that studied whether Ottawa should fly the Peace Tower flag at half-mast to mark the deaths of individual soldiers is rejecting the idea - and wants to dramatically scale back the number of days already receiving the ceremonial honour.

The "special days" that would be scrapped include Vimy Ridge Day on April 9 and Workers' Mourning Day on April 28. Also targeted is the last Sunday in September, which marks Police and Peace Officers' National Memorial Day, and Dec. 6, the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

The goal of the proposed new guidelines is to focus attention on Remembrance Day as the only scheduled day on the calendar that would receive the honour.

The flag would continue to fly at half-mast after the deaths of federal officials such as MPs and lieutenant-governors.



The Canadian flag flies at half-mast on the Peace Tower in Ottawa, seen through the Queen's Gate. (*The Canadian Press*)



The report is surfacing as opposition MPs plan to pass a motion tomorrow calling for the Peace Tower flag to fly at half-mast each time a Canadian dies overseas in a military mission.

In advance of losing the nonbinding vote, Conservatives are countering with the federally commissioned report from a who's who of Canadian heraldry called the Secretary of State flag advisory committee. Chaired by Robert Watt, the former chief herald of Canada, the panel also includes current Chief Herald Claire Boudreau, Brad White of the Royal Canadian Legion, and historians René Chartrand and Jacques Monet.

They were asked last year by Jason Kenney, the Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity, to review not only the issue of soldier deaths but the protocol of flying flags at half-mast at federal buildings.

Its chairman, Mr. Watt, argued yesterday that Remembrance Day is the single most appropriate date to honour all fallen soldiers.

"One of our aims was trying to emphasize how important half-masting is as a procedure," said Mr. Watt, in explaining why his panel recommends an end to the "special days" section of the current protocol. "We felt really that the idea of half-masting had been extended beyond where it needed to be, and so we wanted to reinforce its importance by focusing it in as precise and clear a way as possible."

The government is expected to reject the results of tomorrow's vote. It will instead call for the report to be studied by the House of Commons Canadian heritage committee.

As for soldier deaths, the panel recommends easing the rules for soldiers to be honoured locally by flying flags at government buildings at half-mast.

Other than dropping the "special days," the proposed protocol for the Peace Tower and all other government buildings is essentially the same as the status quo. That means flying the flag at half-mast is an honour reserved for the Queen and her family, the current and former governor-general, prime minister, chief justice of the Supreme Court, lieutenant-governors, current members of Parliament, senators and privy councillors. The panel recommends the flag at the Department of Foreign Affairs be flown at half-mast to honour the passing of current heads of mission to Canada.

Liberal MP Andrew Telegdi's motion - which is supported by all three opposition parties - also calls for MPs to observe a moment of silence in the House of Commons.

The government started lowering the flag for soldier deaths under former prime minister Jean Chrétien, and the opposition heavily criticized the Conservatives for stopping the practice.

Mr. Telegdi argued that the Conservatives are simply trying to avoid negative attention surrounding soldiers dying in Afghanistan.

"I'm a Liberal. I voted for extending the mission," Mr. Telegdi said. "But this comes at a heavy price and it's not something we should be sweeping under the rug."

Recommend this article? 32 votes

[View the most recommended](#)

© Copyright 2008 CTVglobemedia Publishing Inc. All Rights Reserved.

CTVglobemedia

globeandmail.com and The Globe and Mail are divisions of CTVglobemedia Publishing Inc., 444 Front St. W., Toronto, ON Canada M5V 2S9
Phillip Crawley, Publisher