

Editorial ? Should it be a national holiday?

There are good arguments, both for and against Parliament's adoption of a private member's bill that would make Nov. 11 a national holiday.

The day is already a federal statutory holiday and is observed as a statutory holiday in the three territories and all provinces, except Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba and Nova Scotia, so the main result of making it a national holiday would be to require employers in the four provinces to give their employees an extra day off or holiday pay if they were required to work.

Perhaps the best argument to be advanced in favour of the proposed declaration is that November is now the only month of the year in Ontario that doesn't either have some sort of public holiday itself or one at the month's end. That used to be the case in February until the provincial government decided in 2008 to follow three other provinces and mark the third Monday of February as Family Day, which coincidentally or otherwise is also celebrated in the United States, but as Presidents Day.

As matters stand, the Easter holiday always falls in March or April, and we have ordinary national holidays in May (Victoria Day), the first of July (Canada Day), Labour Day in September and Thanksgiving Day the second Monday of October, as well as some sort of holiday on the first Monday of August, be it called either Civic Holiday or Simcoe Day.

Another argument to be made is that other countries usually have a public holiday to honour their war dead. In the United States it is Memorial Day, now celebrated on the last Monday of May, although Nov. 11 is marked as Veterans Day, albeit without the poppies or cenotaph ceremonies that accompany Remembrance Day observances in the Canada and most of the Commonwealth. The U.S. observance honours all those who served in the nation's armed forces, unlike Memorial Day, which is traced to the May 1865 declaration ending the Civil War and initially honoured the war dead from both North and South.

As for the arguments against making Nov. 11 an ordinary holiday, perhaps the best is that it would mean closing schools instead of either having in-school observances or arranging to have the students go to the nearest Cenotaph service.

Critics also suggest that it would also mean that much less productivity and an added financial burden to some employers at a time when our economy is hardly robust. (However, we've never seen statistics demonstrate a comparison between the provinces that do and don't make it a statutory holiday.)

Another argument that could be put is that while Remembrance Day is observed in most Commonwealth countries, invariably with a period of silence at 11 a.m. preceded by the Last Post and followed by Reveille, it is almost never a public holiday. Even in Britain, the main observance is the Sunday nearest Nov. 11, when ceremonies take place at local war memorials, with the day itself being marked simply with two minutes of silence.

Perhaps if, as is so often the case, the private member's bill fails to win support in the Commons, the Ontario government might consider the option of legislation that would make Nov. 11 a full statutory holiday for perhaps three years, in an effort to determine once and for all whether it's a good idea.

But in the meantime, let's hope that in this centenary of the outbreak of 'the war to end all wars' we shall see a record attendance Tuesday at all our local cenotaphs.