

Pope John Paul II Day

Parliament says yes to Pope John Paul II Day

E-mail 1 Comment Written by Deborah Gyapong, Canadian Catholic News Friday, 21 June 2013 12:14

Blessed Pope John Paul II. - Catholic Register file photo OTTAWA - A private member's bill to designate April 2 as Pope John Paul II Day in Canada received all-party support and passed third reading in the House of Commons June 12.

Conservative MP Wladyslaw Lizon's Bill C-266 passed 217 to 42, with support not only from his fellow Conservatives but also from Liberals, the Bloc Quebecois and some NDP members. The only party leader to vote no was Thomas Mulcair of the NDP. All opposing votes came from the NDP.

More than a dozen cabinet ministers supported the bill, as did Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau and Green Party Leader Elizabeth May. Prime Minister Stephen Harper was attending G-8 meetings in Great Britain at the time of the vote. The bill now goes to Senate for final approval.

Pope John Paul II was pontiff for 27 years, from 1978 until his death on April 2, 2005. "I would like to make it very clear that this is not a religious bill," Lizon told the House during an hour of debate June 11. "This is not a bill to aid or promote one religion over another or give a special recognition to one particular Pope.

"As I have already mentioned, this is a bill to recognize Pope John Paul II's legacy, which goes well beyond his role in the Catholic Church. He stood for religious tolerance and freedom, and he spent a great deal of time encouraging inter-religious dialogue. To me, this represents a big part of what it means to be Canadian.

"Pope John Paul II proved that nothing is impossible. He stood up for populations that were oppressed by totalitarian regimes. He will be remembered for his role in the collapse of several stifling dictatorships, and for the way he inspired peaceful opposition to communism in Poland, leading to its eventual collapse in Central and Eastern Europe." NDP MP Craig Scott asked why, if the bill was not intended to "celebrate any particular religion or single out any particular Pope," the Bill was not calling for Karol Wojtyla Day.

"I do not quite understand why we should be afraid to designate a day for a man who, we cannot deny, was a leader of the Catholic Church," Lizon responded.

Immigration Minister Jason Kenney said there was considerable precedent to honour religious leaders. He mentioned an NDP motion that received unanimous consent that recognized the Five Ks of the Khalsa of Sikhism. A Liberal motion that also received unanimous consent recognized Islamic History Month, Kenney said. There were also motions to grant citizenship to the Dalai Lama, a Buddhist religious leader and to the Aga Khan, a Muslim religious leader, Kenney said.

"I am well aware this is a sensitive topic and opinion is divided when it comes to recognizing the good actions of a religious man of such importance in the Roman Catholic Church," said NDP MP Manon Perreault from Quebec's Montcalm riding.

She praised John Paul II's efforts on bringing religious leaders of all faiths together at the