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Pa. mayor apologizes for replacing official POW-MIA flag with Syrian flag

By [Jessica Chasmar](#) - *The Washington Times* - Wednesday, May 13, 2015

Mayor Ed Hozza Jr. of Whitehall Township, Pennsylvania, apologized Monday for briefly removing a POW-MIA flag last month outside the municipal building so that a Syrian flag could fly in its place to celebrate Syria's Independence day.

Mr. Hozza said he did not intend to offend the Lehigh Valley veterans who are calling for his resignation, The Express-Times [reported](#).

"As mayor, I represent everyone in our diverse community of Whitehall," Mr. Hozza said during a heated township commissioners meeting Monday night. "I love this country and cherish our veteran community."

He pointed out that the region's Syrian-American community is largely Christian and some of them are also veterans, The Express-Times reported.

The POW-MIA flag flies below the American flag on a single pole in front of the municipal building. It was removed from the pole for about an hour during the Syrian flag-raising event on Saturday, April 18, one day after Syria's Independence Day or Evacuation Day.

Mr. Hozza said that because the township only has one flag pole at its municipal building, the Syrian flag was flown under the American flag.

"I apologize for that action, not knowing what the flag etiquette was at the time," he said.

Defending himself, the Democratic mayor said: "I support our veterans by attending every Memorial Day and Veterans Day service in the township. I also attend the annual ceremony at the Hokendauqua American Legion to retire our American flags in a respectful manner," WFMZ-TV [reported](#).

Mr. Hozza said he would look into raising money for the installation of a second flag pole in front of the building.

President of the American Amarian Syrian Charity Society's, which hosted the event, also apologized to the offended veterans. Aziz Wehbey said the ceremony was held to mark Syria's independence from France and to celebrate the accomplishments of Syrian-Americans in the Lehigh Valley, The Express-Times reported.

"There was no intention to disrespect the veterans or our soldiers," he said.

American Legion member Clifford Erb said he blames the mayor, not the Syrian-American community, for the flap.

"It's not your fault. You had nothing to do with this," he told Mr. Wehbey before comparing the mayor to "Hanoi Jane," a derogatory nickname given to actress Jane Fonda following her widely criticized 1972 trip to Hanoi, The Express-Times reported.

At the request of the veterans, commissioners began forming an ad hoc committee that will get authoritative answers about flag etiquette and to consider formulating a new official policy for the township, WFMZ-TV reported.

"This we don't want to ever happen again," Commissioner Phillip Ginder said. "We want to get it right."

Board President Linda Snyder said commissioners would seek the help of veterans to come up with legislation to resolve the issue.

"We will not write the legislation tonight because it would be too hasty," she said.

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