

Chretien suggests he will soften reporting requirements for MPs' spouses

OTTAWA (CP) - Prime Minister Jean Chretien, facing widespread backbench opposition, suggested Tuesday he'll back down on his plan to require spouses of MPs to report their assets and incomes. An outcry last week by backbenchers saying they had been unfairly targetted in the prime minister's proposed new ethics guidelines has led him to reconsider, Chretien said after a cabinet meeting.

"I think that a spouse is a spouse and they have the right to earn a living," he said. "So we have to find a proper balance."

He noted a parliamentary committee had recommended that spouses and their assets and incomes be included in the guidelines for MPs.

Chretien also suggested the entire ethics package, promised in June amid an ongoing scandal about government contracts, may be open to review when it goes to a parliamentary committee for fine-tuning.

"The committee will look at the proposition and we will be flexible about changes because it is involving members of Parliament and senators and ministers," he said.

"We will make a suggestion and we will listen to the propositions that will be coming from the House of Commons."

© The Canadian Press, 2002