

# Prime minister to take another shot at dismantling long-gun registry

BY JANICE TIBBETTS AND MARK KENNEDY, POSTMEDIA NEWS    SEPTEMBER 16, 2010



SEPTEMBER 8 - Prime Minister Stephen Harper speaks to his loyal Conservative supporters at Royal Roads University in Victoria, B.C.

**Photograph by:** Adrian Lam, Times Colonist

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OTTAWA — The Harper government, while conceding the "die is cast" in a vote to keep the long-gun registry, is firmly standing its ground to dismantle it, with the prime minister heading to the hometown of undecided MPs and a senior cabinet minister blaming "Toronto elites" for the push to save the database.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper will travel Friday to Thunder Bay, Ont., where New Democrats John Rafferty and Bruce Hyer, on record as registry opponents, have yet to declare their intentions for Wednesday's House of Commons vote.

"It appears the die is cast, but we'll have to wait for next week's vote to see which opposition MPs are brave enough to show up in the House to vote against their constituents' wishes," said Andrew MacDougall, a spokesman in the Prime Minister's Office.

Harper is expected to reinforce his message that MPs who flip-flop on the registry could pay a price on voting day.

John Baird, the Tory House leader, came out swinging against NDP leader Jack Layton and Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff on Thursday as he accused "Toronto elites" for putting pressure on rural MPs in their parties to vote against their constituents' wishes.

"I honestly share the disappointment of many of my colleagues that people who have fought for so long, so hard, so passionately against the registry are now feeling the pressure from Toronto leaders, Mr. Ignatieff and Mr. Layton," Baird told a news conference.

"If we make clear and unambiguous promises in our constituencies and then face pressure from Toronto elites, we'll be accountable for that."

Baird went on the offensive as a fifth New Democrat, Carol Hughes, announced she will switch sides by voting against Tory backbencher Candice Hoepfner's private member's bill to eliminate the registry.

Hoepfner's bill, which the government supports, handily passed a preliminary vote last November, with the help of 12 New Democrats and eight Liberals. The margin this time is expected to be razor thin.

The New Democrats say they have the six vote-changers they believe they need to save the registry.

Ignatieff is "whipping" the vote to force his dissidents to vote along party lines, a move that put the fate of the registry in the hands of the New Democrats, who are permitted to vote freely.

Manitoba New Democrat Niki Ashton is scheduled to make an announcement about her voting plans on Friday and her colleague, Peter Stoffer, from Nova Scotia, has scheduled a news conference for Monday.

Layton on Thursday called on Harper to sign on to an NDP "practical and doable" plan to fix the registry in hopes of making it palatable to rural opponents, who argue the \$4-million-a-year database is a waste of taxpayer money and punishes law-abiding gun owners.

"The bottom line is he no longer has the votes to ram this bill through the House," said Layton. "So, therefore, he has a choice. He can exploit the bill's failure and drive wedges and play that American-style of politics, or he can start listening to all those Canadians, urban and rural, who really want to see some bridge building and compromising done here."

Baird, however, reiterated Harper's promise that if the bill is killed in next Wednesday's vote, the Conservative government remains committed to scrapping the long-gun registry.

Layton said an NDP member will introduce a private member's bill to amend the registry, as soon as possible after Parliament reconvenes next week. Layton's plan, among other things, would make registration free, streamline the sign-up process and decriminalize first- and second-time failures to register.

Hughes said in a news release she was put off by "Stephen Harper's increasingly divisive campaign to scrap it outright."

Campaigning on both sides of the debate has intensified in recent days. The Conservatives have launched radio ads and billboards in opposition ridings where MPs are reversing their votes.

The long-gun registry was created as part of a wider law on gun control, created by the former Liberal government after the 1989 massacre of 14 women at Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal.

Relatives of some of the victims gathered in Layton's Toronto riding on Thursday to press him to secure enough votes to rescue the registry. A gun-control committee from Montreal's Dawson College, where gunman Kimveer Gill went on a shooting rampage four years ago before taking his own life, also made a pitch to preserve the registry.

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