



## Dozen NDP MPs could decide fate of long-gun registry

BY LAURA STONE, POSTMEDIA NEWS AUGUST 25, 2010



Less than a month from now, the heated battle over the nation's long-gun registry could come down to the voting decisions of 12 NDP members of Parliament. Will they vote to keep the registry, or to kill it?

**Photograph by:** Troy Fleece, Leader-Post

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Less than a month from now, the heated battle over the nation's long-gun registry could come down to the voting decisions of 12 NDP members of Parliament. Will they vote to keep the registry, or to kill it?

"You're going to be damned if you do, and you're going to be damned if you don't," said Carol Hughes, NDP MP for the northern Ontario riding of Algoma-Manitoulin-Kapuskasing.

Those dozen opposition MPs are in everyone's crosshairs as the opposition politicians most likely to vote alongside Conservatives in favour of a bill to scrap the long-gun registry. The registry was created by the Liberal government in 1995 in response to the Montreal Ecole Polytechnique massacre in 1989. But its usefulness in preventing crime has been furiously debated ever since.

Conservative MP Candice Hoepfner has introduced a private member's bill to kill the registry, but there's an opposition motion to knock down this bill on Sept. 22. If the motion passes, Hoepfner's bill is dead and the registry stays. But if Hoepfner musters the support of a majority, the bill moves on to third reading and possibly the Senate.

The fate of the registry has made headlines recently: the replacement of the RCMP officer in charge of the Canadian firearms program; a unanimous vote of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police to endorse a new national firearms policing strategy; and Hoepfner's "Scrap the Long-Gun Registry"

tour, which is heading to some NDP and Liberal ridings next month.

The Tories don't hold a Commons majority, so they need help from some other MPs. Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff has "whipped" his party's vote, meaning all members of his caucus are ordered to support the registry and vote against Hoepfner. In the past, some Grit MPs have backed her. The Bloc Quebecois has always voted unanimously against Hoepfner's bill.

That leaves the NDP.

Unlike Ignatieff, NDP Leader Jack Layton, who is for the registry and therefore against the bill, will allow his MPs to vote as they choose.

Five of the 12 NDP MPs who supported the Conservative position after second reading last fall spoke with Postmedia News. The others did not return requests for comment.

Three re-affirmed their support for Hoepfner's bill. Hughes said she will vote against the motion to defeat it but is still thinking about how to vote if the bill makes it to third reading, the stage before the Senate.

A spokesman for John Rafferty said the Thunder Bay MP will only discuss the matter with constituents and local media.

The three in support of Hoepfner's bill are NDP MPs Peter Stoffer, who represents Sackville-Eastern Shore, N.S.; Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic); and Jim Maloway (Elmwood-Transcona, Man.).

"As I've said all along, and I've said it since 1995 — so two years before I got even into politics — I've always opposed the registry and would vote to end it once and for all," said Stoffer, who favours tougher handgun laws and education for gun control as opposed to the long-gun registry.

Maloway said he's always supported the Manitoba government's call to scrap the registry, although he'd be open to discussing changes with all the parties if that were presented as an option.

Bevington said he was a "firm believer" in gun control but he will continue to vote as he has in the past — to scrap the registry.

"I will hope that in the future with gun control that we put even more effort into ensuring all people are protected from improper use of firearms," he said.

For her part, Hughes said that at the end of the day, "it's going to be up to the Conservatives as to how they want to handle this."

There is also the question of whether Liberals who represent ridings opposed to the registry will show up for the vote.

Tom Flanagan, a Calgary political scientist and Conservative strategist, said the issue is a divisive one in the NDP caucus, where the majority support the registry.

"I suppose from the point of view of the NDP as a party, the ideal outcome would be to allow the

dissident minority to have their free vote but somehow for the gun registry (bill) to be defeated anyway," said Flanagan.

"I think the NDP, the 12 NDP members, they will decide and may take these recent events into account, but I think the main thing on their mind will be, 'What does this mean for my re-election?'"

Nelson Wiseman, a political-science professor at the University of Toronto, said the debate around the long-gun registry is symbolic, not practical.

"In my opinion the long-gun registry has effectively been scrapped in the sense that no one is being compelled now to register," said Wiseman.

"The issue is primarily about the Conservatives trying to widen the wedge within both parties, and I think that's smart politics. I'm not being critical of it. I'm saying, this is how the game is played."

More Canadians want to get rid of the gun registry than want to keep it but support for eliminating the long-debated registry has fallen a bit in the last year, a new poll suggests.

Angus Reid released a poll Tuesday reporting 44 per cent of Canadians support scrapping the registry compared to 35 per cent who want to keep it. Twenty-one per cent of Canadians are not sure whether to get rid of it or not.

Support for scrapping the registry is highest in the Prairies (65 per cent) and lowest in Quebec (32 per cent).

The poll was taken online on Aug. 17 and 18 from a random sample of Angus Reid Forum panellists and is considered to be accurate within 3.1 percentage points.

The poll suggests support for eliminating the registry has gone down since the last time the House of Commons voted on Hoepfner's bill in November 2009.

An Angus Reid poll done that month found 51 per cent of Canadians supported eliminating the registry, while 34 per cent opposed eliminating it and 15 per cent weren't sure.

— with file from Mia Rabson, Winnipeg Free Press

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