

Anti-gun activists rap kill bill

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OTTAWA -- A federal spending watchdog group is picking up arms in the brewing battle to kill the long-gun registry, but the pro-control side is fighting back.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation is flooding its 60,000 supporters with letters today urging them to lobby MPs and party leaders to help abolish the 14-year-old registry. The debate is heating up before a scheduled Nov. 4 vote on private member's bill C-391.

CTF federal director Kevin Gaudet said fury remains strong among hunters, anglers and recreational gun groups across the country, who see the registry as an "unresolved festering sore." Others in urban centres hate it just as much for financial reasons.

"It was a stupid idea in the first place and a ridiculous waste of money on an ongoing basis," Gaudet said.

Wendy Cukier, president of the Coalition for Gun Control, said the ad campaign could be effective, but carries high political stakes for the Conservative party trying to win over urban ridings, women voters and Quebec. She insisted the registry is not designed to prevent lawful use of guns but to enhance accountability and reduce the risk of weapons being misused or winding up in the wrong hands.

"If the Conservatives are successful, we will have more information about Canadian cats and dogs than seven million firearms," she said. "Without information about who owns guns and the guns they own, there is no effective control. Internationally, most countries licensing gun owners and registering firearms are moving to strengthen controls. This would be a huge step backwards."

Conservatives are ramping up efforts to pass Manitoba MP Candice Hooppner's bill to repeal the registry, running radio ads and dropping household flyers in targeted opposition ridings in the run-up to the critical vote that would send C-391 to committee for further study.

Karl Belanger, spokesman for NDP Leader Jack Layton, said their caucus will be free to vote how they want.

"This is a vote to send a backbencher's bill to committee for further study and will not be whipped," he said, slamming the ads as proof the Conservatives are taking a "divisive" approach.

Jill Fairbrother, spokeswoman for Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff, said private member's bills are traditionally free votes and she does not expect this one will be any different.