

Ignatieff moves to save gun registry

By Janice Tibbetts, Canwest News Service April 19, 2010 1:17 PM

OTTAWA — Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff made a pitch Monday to save the federal gun registry by proposing changes that would satisfy opponents on the Liberal benches who voted last fall to scrap the weapons databank.

Ignatieff, speaking to a gathering of the Canadian Police Association, said he would like to make it easier for firearms owners to register their long guns, and failure to do so would not result in a criminal charge the first time around.

"It would be wrong to ignore the frustration and legitimate criticisms we have heard about the gun registry in rural Canada, in northern Canada, in remote Canada," said Ignatieff.

The Liberal party created the registry as a key element of an expansive gun-control package and the Harper Conservatives have repeatedly promised to scrap it.

A Conservative backbencher, Candice Hoepfner, introduced a bill last year to eliminate the registry and it passed by a clear 164-137 margin in the House of Commons in November.

The proposed bill now moves to the all-party public safety committee for hearings before returning to the Commons for a final vote. The committee holds its first meeting on the registry Tuesday.

Ignatieff, who permitted a free vote among his MPs the last time around, said he will whip the vote next time so that his caucus is united in support of the registry.

It is unclear whether the unified Liberal opposition to the bill would defeat it — since there were enough registry opponents within the NDP ranks in the November vote that the Liberal numbers would not have saved the bill from defeat.

The bill would eliminate the need to register rifles and shotguns. The requirement to register handguns would remain in place.

The registry was introduced more than 14 years ago as part of a wider gun-control package, largely after lobbying from the families of victims of the 1989 Montreal massacre, when Marc Lepine used a semi-automatic rifle to kill 14 women at Ecole Polytechnique.

Police, who normally side with the Harper government on law-and-order initiatives, have been at odds with the Conservatives over the program, maintaining it is an important crime-fighting tool that they use often.

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