

## **Police must do more to sell gun registry: Bill Blair**

CTV.ca News Staff

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The president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police says his organization needs to do a better job of educating rural Canadians on how police use the long-gun registry.

"Police chiefs and police officers who work right across Canada, in rural communities and in urban communities in every region of this country use this registry and they use it to keep those communities safe," Bill Blair, who is also chief of Toronto's police service, told CTV's Power Play.

"I think the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Police Association have to do a better job of communicating that information to all Canadians, including rural Canadians. That will help people understand why we're so strongly supporting maintaining this registry."

The Canadian Police Association, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, and the Canadian Association of Police Boards all support the registry.

However, Conservative MP Candice Hoepfner has introduced a private members bill to scrap it. Bill C-391 would also destroy the registry's records on about seven million shotguns and rifles. The bill will likely have its final reading in May.

"This is one of those rare issues where the police chiefs of Canada, the police unions of Canada and those responsible for governance and oversight of police services are united in our common cause," Blair said.

"The registry has worked exceptionally well for us. That information, if lost to us, would directly impact on our ability to conduct criminal investigations and to keep our officers and our communities safer."

Following Blair's comments, Hoepfner defended the bill she introduced, saying that it would not change the requirements for licensing, storage or transportation of firearms.

"All it does is change the requirements to register long guns," she said.

"My bill also wouldn't change the information that police officers have" because they would still be able to pull up who is a licensed gun owner, she added.

However, Blair said police access the registry 11,500 times a day to find out details such as the type and number of long guns registered to a licensed owner.

"Going into a potentially dangerous situation that information can help keep a cop safe," he said.

Police also rely on the registry to conduct criminal investigations related to firearm thefts, and to encourage responsible storage, sales and disposal of weapons, he said.

Yesterday, Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff proposed a number of amendments to the registry intended to bolster support for it in Liberal-held rural ridings.

Ignatieff suggested abolishing fees to obtain, renew or upgrade a gun licence, "streamlining" the registration process and making first-time registration offences a "non-criminal, ticketing offence." He also said members of his caucus who vote for the bill will face disciplinary measures.

But whether or not Liberal MPs will vote unanimously against scrapping the registry remains to be seen.

When Bill C-391 came up for second reading in November, some Liberals and New Democrats voted with Tory MPs to pass the bill.

The Liberal leader's decision to enforce party discipline on the vote has angered some legislators.

Saskatchewan MP Garry Breitkreuz even suggested that Ignatieff should be physically assaulted.

"His true colours are showing and, if his caucus has any integrity, those colours should be black and blue," Breitkreuz said in a statement released Tuesday.

He also wrote that The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police is "like a cult."

"They should be ashamed."

*With files from The Canadian Press*

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