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## Future of gun registry is in Layton's hands

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OTTAWA — NDP Leader Jack Layton holds the future of the controversial federal gun registry in his hands after the public safety committee voted Thursday to send Manitoba Conservative MP Candice Hoepfner's bill to kill it back to the House of Commons with a negative recommendation.

Liberals and the Bloc Quebecois are expected to vote en masse against Hoepfner's private-member's bill in the House of Commons next week.

The Conservatives will support it, leaving the NDP to cast the deciding votes.

Twelve of the 36 NDP MPs voted in favour of Hoepfner's bill on second reading. So did eight Liberals. Combined with the Conservative vote, that gave the bill a lifeline and pushed it through the committee stage.

But since then, Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff has decided to require all his MPs to vote to maintain the registry. The question is whether Layton will order his MPs to do the same.

"All the pressure is on Mr. Layton and the NDP now," Liberal public safety critic Mark Holland said.

Hoepfner agrees the NDP is the key to her bill's survival.

"The only way it won't be killed is if I get some NDP support," she said Thursday.

She expressed frustration over the turn of events and said she will be "challenging" the MPs who voted for her bill the first time to do so again.

So the dozen NDP MPs who voted for the bill will be subjected to intense lobbying by their own party and the Conservatives.

On Thursday, Layton's office said he was unavailable to comment. So far, Layton has given no indication what he will do but it is customary to allow MPs to vote freely on private member's bills. As well, the NDP has never required MPs to vote along party lines on a private member's bill.

The Liberals contend this is really a government bill masquerading as a private member's bill as Prime Minister Stephen Harper has promised to eliminate the gun registry.

Hoepfner acknowledged the bill came from her because of the free vote allowed on private member's bills.

Hoepner and the Conservatives argue NDP and Liberal MPs who vote to keep the gun registry will be defeated in the next election.

"MPs will be held accountable by their constituents," Hoepner said.