

Hepburn: U.S. gun lobby brings hardline tactics to Canada

Toronto Star May 13 2010

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For generations, the [National Rifle Association](#) has been one of the richest and most powerful lobby groups in the United States.

It is legendary for its steadfast support for Americans' right to carry everything from cute little pistols women can hide in a purse to assault rifles.

It's also known for its ability to influence the outcome of U.S. elections by targeting its wrath — and its money — against any politician who dares to advocate for tighter gun controls.

Now, with little fanfare, the NRA has successfully exported its hardline lobbying tactics north into Canada by working with Conservative party members and pro-gun groups in the current fight to repeal the federal long-gun registry.

"There is a well-funded, U.S.-inspired campaign to misrepresent the facts" about the value of the gun registry, says Wendy Cukier, president of the [Coalition for Gun Control](#). "Millions have been spent on targeted campaigns and strategies."

Cukier is deeply worried about the fate of the controversial registry because the Conservatives seem to have enough support from New Democrat MPs to kill it.

She blames aggressive, targeted advocacy by the pro-gun lobby, coupled with complacency by citizens who support gun controls, for the registry being near death.

In November, a private member's bill by Manitoba MP Candice Hoepfner to abolish the registry, which was enacted in 1995 and phased in through 2003, passed second reading by a 164-137 vote. Some 12 New Democrats and eight Liberals voted with the Tories.

A Commons committee is now holding public hearings on the bill. Cukier is to appear on May 25. A third and final vote on the bill is expected as early as mid-June.

The NRA is helping Canadian groups fight the registry by raising money and coaching them on how to lobby politicians.

"They are highly motivated, with lots of money," Cukier says.

One of their new tactics is to target individual MPs, especially those in rural areas where opposition to the gun registry is loudest.

The vocal and politically strong pro-gun alliance includes the [Canadian Taxpayers Federation](#) and multiple grassroots groups such as the [Canadian Shooting Sports Association \(CSSA\)](#), the [Canadian Firearms Institute](#), the [Canadian Unlicensed Firearms Owners Association](#) and websites like the [Right to Bear Arms in Canada](#) and [Canadian Gun Nutz](#).

The NRA is cheering them on.

Wayne LaPierre, the NRA's executive vice-president, wrote in a recent article titled "Standing Guard" published on the CSSA website that "if all goes well in the Canadian Parliament, Dominion gun owners will be freed from 14 years of living under the crushing weight of a bureaucratic, scandal-ridden, wasteful, invasive, \$2 billion, error-ridden and inarguably worthless long-gun registry."

He described the November vote as "a stunning victory for gun owners" and quoted the research director of the far-right Colorado-based Independence Institute as saying that repeal of the registry "would be of tremendous global significance."

LaPierre also used the article to attack Cukier, calling her views "a poisonous media brew" filled with "big lies" and "myths" about the value of gun laws.

Leading the charge for pro-gun advocates on Parliament Hill is the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, which brags of its 15-year campaign to kill the registry and which has spent huge sums of money drumming up grassroots support against the registry.

Also active is the Canadian Firearms Institute, which talks about opening "an Ottawa war room to react to lies and misinformation spread by anti-gun forces."

Significantly, its top executive claims to be lobbying "all of the vulnerable opposition MPs to make sure they stay onside with eliminating the registry."

In particular, the lobbyists are focused on the 12 NDP members who backed the bill last fall. If the 12 MPs stand firm with the Tories and the pro-gun forces, then the registry likely will die.

Most of the 12 members are in ridings that could easily vote Conservative in the next election. That's exactly the warning the NRA-backed gun groups are sending to the MPs: Vote for us or we will fight you at the polls.

While Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff has ordered all his MPs to support the gun registry on the final vote, NDP Leader Jack Layton seems ready to bow to pro-gun pressure and let his MPs vote as they wish.

It's an unprincipled decision by Layton, who must be praying NDP supporters in Toronto and Vancouver aren't paying attention to the fact that although Layton says his party backs gun control, many of his MPs are doing just the opposite.

Cukier fears Layton will cave to the gun lobbies, thus killing the registry. If that happens, the NRA will have its first victory in Canada.

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