

## Conservative MP's bid to abolish gun registry fails

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National Post Published: Monday, May 25, 2009

OTTAWA -- An attempt by a Saskatchewan Conservative MP to abolish the controversial long-gun registry quietly died Monday.

Garry Breitkreuz, who represents a riding in rural Saskatchewan, had introduced a private member's bill in the House of Commons aimed at scrapping the controversial registry and the bill was to be debated in the House of Commons Monday morning. But Mr. Breitkreuz failed to show up for the debate and, according to rules of procedure in the House, that meant his private member's bill now falls to the bottom of the priority list. MPs have introduced more than 190 private member's bills and must count on a lottery system to have their bill advanced.

The Coalition for Gun Control, a lobby group, had opposed Mr. Breitkreuz's bill, saying it would effectively gut gun control in Canada. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police also opposed Breitkreuz's bill.

While the move to abolish the long-gun registry is popular in many English-speaking rural areas in Canada -- areas where the Conservatives are the dominant political party -- it was less popular in urban areas and in Quebec -- areas where the Conservatives need to grow support.

Nathan Cullen, an NDP MP from British Columbia who supports the gun registry, said he believes Mr. Breitkreuz's failure to attend the debate on his own bill was no accident but was a way for the Conservatives to back away from the issue.

"This is a huge step down for them," Mr. Cullen said.

Mr. Breitkreuz was not available for comment but an aide said that he allowed his bill, C-301, to die in favour of a similar bill, C-391, put forward by Manitoba Conservative MP Candice Hoepfner.

Ms. Hoepfner's bill would require registration of guns that are either prohibited or restricted. Hunting rifles, generally speaking, are neither restricted nor prohibited. If her bill became law, individuals still would be required to have a valid firearms licence, and to go through a police background check and safety training to purchase or possess firearms and to purchase ammunition. Individuals would also continue to be required to register prohibited and restricted firearms, such as handguns.

Private member's bills, like the one from Mr. Breitkreuz and Ms. Hoepfner, rarely become law.

Meanwhile, in April, the government introduced its own legislation to dismantle the long-gun registry but did so in the Senate. That bill, S-5, has essentially the same objective as Hoepfner's private member's bill.

The Conservatives' political opponents saw the move to introduce legislation in the Senate as a half-hearted attempt by the government to look as if it was trying to kill the registry without actually doing so.

The Liberals, who back the gun registry, hold a majority of seats there and the Conservatives have provided no timetable for the legislation's advance through the Senate.

When his bill was tabled in February, Mr. Breitkreuz called the gun registry "a useless money pit" and won the enthusiastic backing of many gun registry opponents.

"I believe Canadians would rather see their tax dollars keeping guns out of the hands of criminals and gangs, instead of trying to control law-abiding citizens," Mr. Breitkreuz said at the time.

As recently as March 21, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, in a speech to the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, was urging supporters of Breitkreuz's bill to pressure their MPs to get behind that bill.

Mr. Harper's appearance came days after Mr. Breitkreuz faced an uproar over plans to address a dinner where the organizers, the Canadian Shooting Sports Association, gave away a Beretta semi-automatic handgun as a raffle prize.

At the Harper event, organizers gave away a hunting package, which included a rifle.

Earlier this month, the Harper government again extended an amnesty for firearms owners to register unlicensed guns, giving owners until May 16, 2010 a chance to register their weapons.

Conservatives argue the long-gun registry only penalizes law-abiding Canadians and does nothing to keep illegal guns from ending up in the hands of criminals.