

Police groups join forces in support of long gun registry

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Representing everyone from beat cops to chiefs, Canada's main police groups are joining forces for the first time to try to stop the Harper government from killing the long-gun registry.

The Conservatives argue that Canada's police forces are divided on the need to save the registry and suggest that the leaders who support it are out of touch with front-line police officers.

But the Canadian Police Association, which represents 41,000 officers across Canada, will share the stage at a news conference in Ottawa on Thursday with the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police as part of a new campaign to save the registry.

Charles Momy, president of the Canadian Police Association, said he wants to make it clear that his members stand "shoulder to shoulder" with their chiefs on the issue, two weeks after Conservative MP Garry Breitkreuz derided the police leadership as a cult that pretends the long-gun registry saves lives.

Mr. Momy said front-line cops disagree with their chiefs on a number of issues, but while they support the Conservative government's law-and-order policies, the gun-registry is a different matter.

"We're going there together to show a united front," he said in an interview. "We want to make it clear to Canadians and politicians and everyone else that we are not divided among the various groups."

Mr. Momy, who spent 23 years as a police officer in the Ottawa area, said the debate needs to be refocused on the way that police use the registry to help victims of crimes.

"People are making it out to look like the hunters and the trappers and the farmers are the victims [of the gun registry]," he said.

According to Mr. Momy, police can use the gun registry to help solve gun crimes, prevent suicides and find out about potential dangers when they enter a house or approach a suspect. He said the Conservative government's approach is like taking away a police officer's sidearm or baton because he or she hasn't had to use them.

Mr. Momy will participate in a news conference and launch a new website with Toronto police chief William Blair, who is the president of the CACP, and Carol Allison-Burra, director of the Canadian Association of Police Boards.

A spokesman for Mr. Blair said the joint appearance by all levels of police officials is a first, designed to bring the debate to facts, instead of ideology.

"The gun registry saves lives," said Mark Pugash of the Toronto Police Service.

Mr. Pugash disputed the Conservative argument that police chiefs are out of touch with their officers, adding that Mr. Breitkreuz's comment is "not intelligent debate designed to lead to safer communities."

In the House of Commons on Wednesday, Conservative MPs urged the Liberal Party and the NDP to allow free votes on a private-member's bill that would effectively kill the long-gun registry.

“[The gun registry] unfairly targets hard-working farmers and hunters, not criminals. It is time to put an end to this billion dollar Liberal boondoggle once and for all,” said Dave McKenzie, the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Public Safety.

Mr. Momy and Mr. Pugash, however, disputed the Conservative government’s arguments that the gun registry is ineffective and costly. While they agree that the cost of establishing the gun registry, at more than \$1-billion, was a waste, they said the current \$4-million annual price tag is well spent.