



## Leadership rivalries part of democracy, PM says



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Cabinet ministers jostling for position during a leadership race is a part of democracy, and Prime Minister Jean Chretien said Tuesday he has no intention of trying to stop Liberal contenders from taking shots at each other.

"The candidates, if they are attacked, they defend themselves -- it's natural, it's democracy," he told reporters after a cabinet meeting.

While the Liberal leadership has long been a divisive issue in caucus, cabinet ministers have been openly attacking each other recently on issues such as the Kyoto accord and overspending on the national gun registry.

"I cannot say, 'shut up!' You don't want to vote for a pussy cat. You want to vote for some people who have strong views and who are not afraid to express them."

Chretien recalled similar infighting among ministers when former prime minister Lester Pearson announced he was stepping down as Liberal leader.

"It is always like that in a period leading to a leadership contest," Chretien said.

"(Pearson) had to tell the ministers at that time (because) we were in a minority position."

Chretien reiterated Tuesday that he appreciates the different views of his ministers.

"When a problem comes in front of the cabinet, they express their views," he said. "We don't spend hours there for everybody to say exactly the same thing.

"At the end of the meeting the prime minister calls a decision and that's what I intend to do in the next 14 months. But when the decision is made in cabinet, you know, you support the cabinet."

Chretien was also reacting to an editorial in Tuesday's *The Globe and Mail* which called his decision to remain in power until February 2004, a "misstep."

"Just as Pierre Trudeau emerged from his stroll in 1984 knowing it was time to retire, so Jean Chretien should shorten his long period of lame-duckery," *The Globe* wrote.

But Chretien, buoyed Tuesday by the House vote on ratification of the Kyoto accord, said he has no intention of stepping down before his stated retirement date.

Chretien said the media has "been repeating the same thing for years."

"So I am taking walks in February this year, February next year. "

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