



## Rock says gun registry a 'terrific achievement'



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Industry Minister Allan Rock defended Ottawa's beleaguered gun registry Sunday and said he doesn't think the massive cost overrun will hurt his potential Liberal leadership ambitions.

"If I run, I've always intended to advertise an association with what I think is a terrific achievement in the prime minister's government," Rock told CTV's Question Period. "My point is, 'let's not undermine the law', which is sound."

The controversial program grabbed the headlines earlier this week when Auditor General Sheila Fraser revealed the registry, which was originally budgeted to cost the government \$2 million, will cost \$1 billion by 2005.

Rock introduced the national gun registry in 1995 when he was justice minister. He said "circumstances change" and blamed some provinces, the gun lobby and the Alliance Party for at some of the escalation of costs.

"When I appeared before a Commons Committee in 1995 I gave honest answers about our cost calculations," Rock said. "If there are problems with cost overruns, let's fix them, but the underlying program is good."

When the program was introduced, an estimated cost of \$119-million cost was supposed to be offset by \$117 million in registration fees, making the actual cost to taxpayers a mere \$2 million.

Rock said then-Ontario premier Bob Rae was an enthusiastic supporter of the program and promised to implement the program. However, Rock said the cost of the program rose when new premier Mike Harris objected to the program. He also pointed a finger at Alberta Premier Ralph Klein for fostering opposition to the registry.

"We were left with a very different reality once those changes took place," Rock said. "The gun lobby challenged law and took it to the Supreme Court. The gun lobby and the Alliance party filled gun-owners' heads with nonsense (so) money was spent on bringing facts to the public.

"So let's be fair here."

Rock and current Justice Minister Martin Cauchon, who also appeared Sunday on Question Period, pointed to the public safety aspects of the program when pressed on why such a large jump in cost was not communicated to Parliament.

"I'm fully committed to gun control," Cauchon said. "Yes, I'm concerned as a minister and Canadians have a right to be concerned. And we will fix it and have a good registry." Rock said no single department or bureaucrat is responsible for the bloated cost of the program.

"It's a government responsibility," said Rock. "We all collectively took part in this. We ran on a platform of gun control."

On Thursday, the government withdrew a request for an additional \$72 million in funding for the project. But both ministers promised that funding for the program will continue



after the administrative problems are corrected.

Liberal MP John Harvard, who was one of the government's most vocal critics last week when the fiasco became known, told Question Period he felt "blindsided" by Fraser's report and was "frustrated" to learn that MPs didn't have the full picture.

"The changes (to the program) cost us a lot of money and we didn't explain it until it came thundering down upon us this week. It was an embarrassment."

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