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Sunday, December 8, 2002

Rock takes shots at Martin's stand

By CP

OTTAWA -- Industry Minister Allan Rock took aim at Paul Martin yesterday, accusing his Liberal leadership rival of hedging on the government's plan to register firearms and of being weak-kneed in the face of controversy.

Martin was quoted yesterday as saying not "another penny" of new money should go toward the national gun registry program until the problems which led to a projected \$1-billion cost overrun are fixed.

Martin also reportedly refused to say whether the centrepiece of Liberal gun laws -- registering the country's more than 10 million firearms -- should be pursued.

Rock said in an interview yesterday the registry had been dearly "bought with blood" in political fights with right-wing parties and gun lobby groups, and accused Martin of caving in to those interests.

"By hedging (on whether to register guns), Paul Martin is playing into the hands of the gun lobby," he said. "At a time like this it's important for us as members of the government to stand up and say clearly we will not give an inch on effective gun control."

Martin's remarks signal a pattern of backing away from hallmark Liberal issues, Rock added.

"Paul Martin prefers to deflect and defer. We see it in Kyoto, in the Clarity Act, we see it in issue after issue," he said. "I think there's a distinct trend developing in the face of controversy."

LEADERSHIP HOPEFUL

Rock, who was lambasted this week by Liberal backbenchers and opposition MPs demanding his resignation for his role in launching the gun registry as justice minister in 1995, has said he intends to join the leadership race. Martin is the only declared candidate and acknowledged frontrunner.

In newspapers yesterday, Martin said he shares "the goals of gun control," but wants to see "a mechanism put in place that is within cost, properly managed, that gets us there."

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