

Gun control victim in Harper legislation

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April 07, 2009 1:00 a.m.

Metro Toronto

After a high-profile shooting, politicians flock to cameras to express outrage and sympathy for the victims. But as elections loom they focus on the complex calculus around votes. Many Canadians are aware of the influence of the powerful National Rifle Association in the U.S., but are astonished to learn how the gun lobby drives the agenda in Canada. Speaking recently to the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, Prime Minister Stephen Harper advocated dismantling essential parts of gun control in Canada and then introduced legislation to the Senate. The proposed law will eliminate the registration of rifles and shotguns, including the powerful semi-automatic rifle like the one used by Marc Lépine at L'École Polytechnique in 1989.

The gun lobby cries, "Punish criminals, not law-abiding gun owners." But where do criminals get their guns? While smuggled handguns fuel crime, so do Canadian guns diverted through theft and illegal sales. And legal gun owners sometimes go off the rails. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police say any gun in the wrong hands is dangerous. All firearm owners need to be licensed and all firearms need to be registered.

How exactly does filling in forms constitute "punishment." We need licences to drive. In most cities we need permits to own dogs and even cats. It's not called "punishment." It's called being responsible and accountable.

Certainly, too much money was spent licensing two million gun owners and registering seven million firearms — \$100 million per year over 10 years according to the auditor general. But the money is gone. It can't be reinvested. The RCMP says ending the registration of long guns will save about \$3 million per year.

Controlling firearms is not a panacea, but it does reduce the risk of gun violence. What sense does it make to dismantle a system that is working? Suicides, particularly among youth and murders of women with guns, have plummeted. Homicides with rifles and shotguns have declined precipitously — thirty-two people were murdered with long guns in 2007 compared to 107 in 1991.

Priscilla deVilliers, whose daughter Nina was abducted and murdered, reminds us: "Six separate inquests recommended licensing and registration of guns, including the inquest into my daughter's death."