

# Use party line to save gun registry, coalition asks leaders.

Survivor of Polytechnique massacre calls on NDP, Liberals to kill private bill.

**James Mennie, The Montreal Gazette**

Published: February 27, 2010,

A local coalition of political and community groups that includes a survivor of the 1989 Polytechnique massacre wants the federal Liberals and New Democratic Party to vote en bloc against a private member's bill abolishing the long-gun registry when it comes before Parliament.

"To (Liberal leader Michael) Ignatieff and (NDP leader Jack) Layton, who both 'say' they support control, what I say is that words are not enough, it's actions that count," said Heidi Rathjen, who survived the assault 21 years ago by a gunman on the École Polytechnique that left 14 female students dead and 13 others wounded.

"Their inaction allowed this bill to pass second reading, and for this bill not to pass third (and final) reading, they have to lay down the law with their parties and disallow a free vote.

"This shouldn't be about politics, this shouldn't be about special interests or ideology, it should be about public safety ... and police across the country support this (registration) system."

Last November, Bill C-391 passed second reading after 18 Liberals and New Democrats supported the legislation that would eliminate information on an estimated 7 million shotguns and rifles.

The Conservatives have argued the registry is a waste of money and an intrusion into the lives of law-abiding gun owners.

Both opposition parties allowed a free vote on the bill - permitting MPs to vote their conscience rather than the party line.

Observers of the vote suggested the opposition members who did support the bill represented rural ridings where the long gun registry is highly unpopular.

The Bloc Québécois voted unanimously against the bill, which has attracted little support in Quebec.

After that vote, which sent the bill to be studied by a parliamentary committee, news broke that a report indicating police consulted the registry more than 2.5 million times in 2007.

Rathjen said she is "flabbergasted" that a generation after the Polytechnique massacre and in the wake of fatal shootings at Concordia University and Dawson College, she still has to promote gun control in Canada.

"It's a testament to the strength of the gun lobby that they keep pushing and pushing all these years at what we have won democratically with the support of Canadians," she said. "It's a scandal."

Rathjen said she and other survivors of the Polytechnique shootings intended to go to Ottawa to testify at committee hearings on the bill.

The coalition includes Bloc Québécois MP Thierry St-Cyr, who said a petition against the bill circulated in his riding of Jeanne-Le-Ber, which includes southwest Montreal, gathered 1,500 names in two weeks.

"There's a lot of public support for the petition," he told reporters, "When we circulated it at métro stations, people were standing in line to sign it."

Parliament resumes sitting on Wednesday. St-Cyr said he intended to table the petition in the House of Commons on March 8, International Women's Day.

Last December, the unions representing 4,000 Montreal police and 3,500 other officers working in Quebec municipalities called for the registry to be maintained.