

A not-so-happy Mother's Day She lost her daughter 13 years ago to young offender with stolen handgun

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Mother's Day is one of the most difficult days of the year for those of us who have lost a child to violence.

It is compounded by the disregard the government shows to the families of victims of gun violence, and the priority it seems to place on appeasing the gun lobby. We are supposed to learn from these tragedies, from the pain that my family and so many other Canadian families have endured. Inquest after inquest has recommended stronger controls on firearms in order to prevent tragedies. And there is evidence that the measures have reduced the death toll.

But once again politics takes priority over public safety.

The Conservative government has tabled Bill S-5 before the Senate, and Private Member's Bill C-301 before the House of Commons. It's a cynical move aimed at appeasing the gun lobby by abolishing the registration of rifles and shotguns.

The Conservatives say the move will save taxpayers money, and it will, about \$3 million a year, according to the RCMP. That's a small amount compared to the costs of gun violence. They suggest the money invested in developing the registry has been wasted. However, police services argue it is a valuable tool and use the registry thousands of times a day.

Gun death and injury have fallen as we have strengthened controls over firearms.

Abolishing the long-gun registry leaves no way to track how many guns a given person possesses, or to hold them accountable for what happens to those guns. It also means that the police will have less information about firearms they might face when going on an emergency call.

It also would mean that police could no longer trace rifles or shotguns, if they turn up at a crime scene.

It would undo the law we fought so hard to establish which required licensing and registration of all firearms in an effort to improve safety.

The repeated assertion that the long-gun registry "does not make Canadians any safer" is not supported by the facts. Critics of the registry say that "criminals do not register their guns," ignoring the fact that legal guns are often diverted to criminal markets through theft and illegal sales, and that controls over legal guns helps stem the flow.

The claim that "guns don't kill, people kill" ignores the fact that people with guns kill more efficiently. The claim that gun control is an "urban issue" ignores the toll taken in rural communities, particularly in domestic violence, suicide and murders of police officers.

The effort to distinguish "duck guns" from rifles and shotguns ignores the fact that a long gun kills just as dead as a handgun.

The claim that the law "punishes" law-abiding gun owners ignores the costs of gun violence, and the "punishment" we survivors suffer every day of our lives.

It is for that reason that one of my Mother's Day wishes this year was for more controls on firearms, not less.

Karen Vanscoy is the mother of Jasmine Vanscoy, who at age 14 was shot and killed in September 1996. She lives in Hamilton.