

Reject gun-registry bill, MPs urged

20th anniversary of Poly near; 'Firearms Act is a monument erected in memory of the victims of the massacre'

By KATHERINE WILTON, The Gazette
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With the 20th anniversary of the Montreal Massacre just weeks away, gun control advocates and the victims' families are urging opposition members of Parliament to vote against a private member's bill that would abolish Canada's long-gun registry.

If the bill is eventually passed by the House of Commons, it will eliminate the need to register the type of semi-automatic rifle that Marc Lépine used in 1989, when he killed 14 women at École Polytechnique.

"The Firearms Act is a monument erected in memory of the victims of the Montreal Massacre, including my daughter Anne-Marie Edward," Suzanne Laplante-Edward said in a statement. "I am disheartened that the Conservative Party of Canada, which claims to be the party of law and order, is ignoring police, ignoring victims and ignoring the vast majority of Canadians to appease the gun lobby."

The vote tomorrow on Bill C-391 does not affect the registry of handguns. However, if adopted, it would eliminate the need to register rifles and shotguns and would require that the existing registration records on 7 million shotguns and rifles be destroyed, said Wendy Cukier, president of the Coalition for Gun Control.

"If you don't have information about who owns guns, you have no way of keeping guns away from dangerous people," Cukier said yesterday.

Opponents of the long-gun registry say the bill has the support of farmers and hunting enthusiasts, who oppose laws that require them to register their firearms and pay for licences.

The private member's bill was introduced by a Conservative MP from Manitoba and will receive second reading in the House of Commons tomorrow.

If it passes second reading, the bill will be studied by a Commons committee and then put to another vote in the Commons and Senate for final approval.

Cukier said she wants to stop the bill's momentum this week and hopes that opposition MPs will defeat it.

Private members' bills are free votes, meaning that MPs can vote as they wish and not along party lines. Although the bill is technically a private member's bill, Cukier said Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the Conservative government are lobbying hard for it to pass.

"The Conservatives have been spending hundreds of thousands of dollars in targeted rural ridings to put pressure on opposition MPs (to support the bill)," Cukier said.

The federal Liberal Party passed the controversial Firearms Act in 1995. It required gun owners to obtain a permit by 2001 and have their guns registered by 2003. The Tories have constantly criticized the registry for its cost overruns - it cost about \$1 billion to implement - and excessive red tape.

Laplante-Edward and the other families of the women killed at École Polytechnique were instrumental in persuading the Canadian government to introduce stricter gun-control laws.

According to the Coalition for Gun Control, homicides with rifles and shotguns have decreased from 107 in 1991 to 32 in 2008, thanks partly to the long-gun registry.

Laplante-Edward said she and the other families will continue to fight to keep the Firearms Act intact because "long-guns kill like handguns."

"We victims of gun violence want more than tears and white ribbons and kind words - we want action," she said.