

Gun registry might have saved my daughter

By Suzanne Laplante-Edward,
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The House of Commons will vote on Bill C-391 today, a bill that proposes to repeal registration for unrestricted firearms and erase the data in the gun registry.

The Firearms Act is a monument erected in memory of the victims of the Montreal massacre, including my daughter, Anne-Marie Edward. I am disheartened that the Conservative party, which claims to be the party of law and order, is ignoring police, victims and the vast majority of Canadians to appease the gun lobby. I am disheartened that the leaders of the Liberal and NDP parties seem unprepared to stop them. I am disheartened that they are pretending that C-391 is a private member's bill they cannot stop. It is really a government bill --the prime minister, the Conservative party and its allies have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to push this bill through.

Just a few months ago, I went to Ottawa to remind parliamentarians of the devastation that a single rifle can do in just 22 minutes. That is how long it took the killer at Polytechnique to shoot 27 women and kill 14. On April 22, in an amazing show of solidarity, the NDP and the Liberals backed a Bloc Quebecois motion reiterating support for the firearms registry and denouncing the Conservative amnesty--an affront to the parliamentary process. While one Liberal opposition member voted against the motion and a couple of NDP members abstained, both Michael Ignatieff and Jack Layton, the founder of the White Ribbon campaign, assured me personally that they would stop Stephen Harper. Who would have believed that just a few months later they appear to have abandoned the victims of gun violence, the police and public safety experts?

After Anne-Marie's death, I devoted myself full time to improve controls on unrestricted rifles and shotguns, which included the gun that was used on Dec. 6, 1989. In 1995, along with the families of Polytechnique, we fought with all our might to pass the firearms law. What is the terrible imposition, the grievous burden posed by the registration of firearms? Gun owners have to complete a form indicating what firearms they own. Without information about who owns guns, and the guns themselves, there is no way for the police to keep guns away from dangerous people. There is no way to hold owners accountable for their guns.

We victims of gun violence want more than tears, white ribbons and kind words. We want action. The semi-automatic Ruger Mini 14 used at Polytechnique in Montreal is still sold as an unrestricted hunting rifle. With C-391, we will no longer know who owns these guns or the seven million other rifles and shotguns in Canada. In most cities, there will be more information about who has cats and dogs than who owns firearms.

Long guns kill like handguns. Women's groups in rural areas repeatedly say they need strong gun controls. The police are also saying that all gun owners need to be licensed

and all guns need to be registered and that almost half the firearms used in crime in the country are these rifles and shotguns.

On April 22, when the opposition parties united to vote for Gilles Duceppe's motion supporting the registry and gave me a standing ovation in the House of Commons, I thought I had achieved a small victory for the victims of gun violence and all Canadians. From my little spot in the gallery, I was so touched and humbled by this recognition, and I thought our law was safe. Now, weeks away from the 20th anniversary of the tragic day, it may be that only Duceppe will be true to his words. It is clear the Canadian gun lobby, like the National Rifle Association, and the Conservatives have lots of money to spend on campaigns and advertising. I firmly hope that we will, once again, have the support of the opposition parties.

We need a national gun registry. Lives depend on it.

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