

November 25, 2009

Dear Sir/Madam,

My daughter Anne-Marie Edward died twenty years ago, on December 6, 1989 and I know all the families are grateful that the deaths of our daughters were not in vain.

One of the many initiatives that were sparked by the tragedy was Canada's gun control movement. For the last twenty years I have dedicated my time and energy, supported by many of the other families, to strengthen Canada's gun control laws. Canada's Firearms Act, passed in 1995, is a monument to the memory of the victims who were killed that day by a dangerous man with a legally acquired semi automatic rifle – the Ruger Mini 14.

I am very disheartened, twenty years after that terrible day and in spite of the evidence that our gun law is working and is an essential tool for police that on November 4, 2009, the House of Commons passed Private member's Bill C-391 through second reading. This bill proposes to repeal registration for hunting guns, i.e. long guns, including the Ruger Mini 14, which are the guns most often used to kill women, children and police officers in this country.

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. I am disheartened that the leaders of the Liberal and the NDP parties are 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. Last April 22, in an amazing show of solidarity, the NDP and the Liberals backed a Bloc Québécois motion reiterating support for the firearms registry. Both Mr. Ignatieff and Mr. 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 would abandon the victims of gun violence, the police and public safety experts?

After the death of my daughter Anne-Marie, I invested myself full time to improve controls on unrestricted rifles and shotguns, which included the gun that was used on December 6 1989. In 1995, along with the families of Polytechnique, we fought with all our might to pass the Firearms law. Tell me, 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 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 and 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. If C-391 pass, we will no longer know who owns these guns or the 7 million other rifles and shotguns in Canada.

Long guns kill like handguns. Women's groups in rural areas have repeatedly said they need strong gun controls to ensure women and children's safety. The police are also saying that all gun owners need to be licensed; that all guns need to be registered; and that almost half the guns used in crime in the country are these rifles and shotguns.

On April 22, when the Opposition parties united to vote for the Bloc Quebecois'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 at the same time humbled by this recognition and I thought our law was safe. Now, as we commemorate the 20th anniversary of the tragic day, only Gilles Duceppe has been true to his words. Ending violence against women and preventing tragedies requires more than wearing a white ribbon. It requires action.

I desperately, right now, need your help to stand up for the gun registry. It is a small inconvenience for gun owners- a form to fill one time with no costs attached. Police need the registry for their investigation but also to take preventive actions in cases of domestic violence and to enforce prohibition orders.

It is clear the Canadian gun lobby, like the American NRA, and the Conservatives have lots of money to spend on campaigns and advertising. But you and I know we need a national gun registry. Lives depend on it. Please speak out and help us to keep the gun registry.

Coalition for Gun Control supporters include the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Public Health Association, the Canada Safety Council, the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, the victims of the Ecole Polytechnique massacre and the Dawson Gun Control Committee, the YWCA of Canada as well as over 300 provincial and local organizations who are united in opposing any efforts to water down the legislation.

Join your voice to the Coalition for Gun Control to defend the registry. Help me keep our daughters' legacy alive.

Suzanne Laplante-Edward
Mother of Anne-Marie Edward

