

# COALITION

for Gun Control / pour le contrôle des armes

www.guncontrol.ca

## Backgrounder: The Harper Government and Gun Control

All the opposition parties - the Liberals, the NDP, the Bloc Québécois and the Green party - have supported the existing firearms law, including the licensing of all gun owners and registration of all firearms - and have proposed a variety of measures to strengthen the laws consistent with the positions of major policing and public safety groups across the country. The Conservatives have stood alone in their efforts to turn back the clock and relax firearms legislation in Canada.

- **Legislation to kill the firearms registry.** One of their first acts after being elected was to introduce legislation to kill the registration of rifles and shotguns. As the Attorney Generals' of Quebec and Ontario along with chiefs of police, violence prevention and public health experts have noted, these changes would put public safety at risk and make it easier for criminals, cop killers and violent spouses to get guns. Police use the registry an average of 8,603 times daily.
- **Amnesty for people who fail to register their rifles or shotguns or to renew their licenses:** When they could not pass their legislation, the Conservatives renewed –twice- its amnesty for gun owners who haven't bothered with the law and enabled those with an expired licence to apply for a new one, preventing the prosecution of people with illegal guns including two cases where guns were allegedly supplied to killers of police officers. Every day the information in the system becomes less reliable putting police and the public at risk. In 2006, 76,000 people let their gun license expire –a 200% increase from the previous year- leading to 234,000 more illegal firearms in circulation. After Laval Police Officer Daniel Tessier was killed, Denis Côté, President of the Quebec Union of Municipal Police Officers said: *"We want every firearm in the country registered and a crack-down on black market firearms that are bought and sold."*<sup>1</sup>
- **Cutting resources for licensing while giving more than \$50 million back to gun owners.** The Conservatives have been starving the system of its financial resources. The government has cut \$10 million per year from the screening, licensing and registration program (then added back \$7 million following the Dawson shooting claiming they added resources to the program). Through extending the fee waiver associated with renewing or upgrading an existing licence, they have refunded or waived \$56.5 million in licensing fees. These funds are needed to screen gun owners. Meanwhile, RCMP statistics reveal the registration of all guns (including handguns) costs \$35.9 million over three years. Ujjal Dosanjh the Liberal Public Safety Critic was recently quoted as saying, *"This government, if it ran the registry appropriately and did not waive fees, in fact would be making a profit"*.<sup>2</sup> That "profit" could be used to fund further education, safety and law enforcement endeavors much in the same way vehicle licensing funds driver education and road safety and maintenance programs.
- **Backtracked on international obligations to fight the illegal trade in guns.** In November 2007, Minister Day postponed the implementation of the marking and tracing regulations aimed at combating the illegal trade in firearms. In an unprecedented joint letter, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Police Association and the Canadian Association of Police Boards urged Minister Day to implement the measures as a way to help investigators track down guns used at crime scenes. They wrote: *"Currently, Canada is profiting from the United States' system of import marking and is not living up to its obligation to reciprocate. If the U.S. can do it, so can Canada."*

<sup>1</sup> Anne Sutherland, "Laval officers deplore Parasiris acquittal," Montreal Gazette, July 14, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Brown, "Tories turn their backs on cash that could pay for oft-maligned gun registry," CBC, April 20, 2008.

- **Replaced representatives from the Canadian Association of Chiefs and the Canadian Police Association and other safety experts with gun lobby groups on the Minister's Advisory Committee on Firearms.** Even under Brian Mulroney, the firearms advisory committee had both gun owners and public safety experts. Immediately on taking office the Conservatives removed the public safety, suicide prevention, violence against women, gun control experts, public health and public administration experts from the minister's firearms advisory committee. It replaced them with a committee consisting entirely of gun owners who oppose the firearms legislation including some who actually suggest arming teachers would prevent tragedies like Dawson college. There are also individuals with ties to the NRA. Four of those members also sit on the Advisory committee to the new parliamentary "Outdoor Caucus" aimed at protecting gun owners interests. In November 2006, the Conservatives allowed MPs to participate in a gun lobby fundraising event which featured members of the advisory council along with the NRA President
- **Refused to update the list of banned semi automatic weapons in spite of pleas from the police.** The government failed to ban military weapons such as the one used at Dawson College even though police have identified more than 100 guns that should never have been imported to Canada for sale to civilians. The day after the Dawson College tragedy, Tony Bernardo, executive director of the Canadian Shooting Sports Association and advisor to the Minister on Firearms and to the Outdoor Caucus, who also owns a Beretta CX4 Storm mentioned: *"To be perfectly honest it's a lot of fun to shoot. The little pistol calibre it comes in gives virtually no recoil. It's very accurate. The firearm is just one of those firearms that's just a lot of fun to spend a day at the range with."*<sup>3</sup>
- **Misled the public about the state of gun control and the statistics on firearms.** Minister Day claim that handguns already are essentially banned now<sup>4</sup>. In fact there are more than 500,000 legal handguns registered to Canadians.<sup>5</sup> High-profile incidents of legal handguns misused by their owners include the shooting of John O'Keefe by a gun club member as he was walking home on Yonge st. in January 2008, the shooting of Laval police officer Daniel Tessier by a legal handgun owner who had failed to report his change of address in March 2007, the shooting by a Beaconsfield, Quebec, psychologist of his two daughters and his wife with a legally owned magnum .357 in October 2006.<sup>6</sup>

***The Coalition for Gun Control is a non-profit organization working to reduce gun death, injury and crime. The Coalition's position is endorsed by over 350 groups including: the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Public Health Association, the Canadian Criminal Justice Association, the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, the Canadian Federation of University Women, and the YWCA of Canada. Visit our website: [www.guncontrol.ca](http://www.guncontrol.ca)***

<sup>3</sup> Steve Mertl. "Alleged college killer's gun is restricted firearm popular with shooters." September 14, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Lewington, "Day gives Toronto \$4.9-million to fight gangs" Globe and Mail, September 3, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Canada Firearms Center. "Report, Commissioner of firearms" 2005 and Kwing Hung, "Firearm Statistics Updated Tables" Department of Justice, January 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Betsy Powell, "'Legal' gun at centre of homicide," Toronto Star, January 15, 2008; Vincent Larouche, "Procès - Policier tué Amateur d'armes à feu," Journal de Montréal, June 4 2008; Sidhartha Banerjee, Cheryl Cornacchia, Kate Lunau and SueMontgomery, "Montreal's Bulgarian community in shock over triple murder; no obvious motive yet for detectives," Montreal Gazette, October 16, 2006.