

May 2010

Open Letter to Mr. Layton and Mr. Ignatieff
House of Commons, Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
cc. to Mr DuCeppe

Re: Defeat Bill C-391. Keep gun control and the gun registry.

Dear Sir,

We ask you and your party to vote against Ms. Candice Hoepfner's Private Member's Bill C-391 which if passed, will eliminate the registration of rifles and shotguns and mean that no records of the sales of these firearms would be maintained. These unrestricted rifles and shotguns include the Ruger Mini 14 that was used at l'École Polytechnique as well as sniper rifles.

Canada passed its gun laws in response to the December 6, 1989 shooting at l'École Polytechnique and its gun laws are recognized internationally as an effective tool to reduce gun violence targeting women. We ask you to honour your commitment to ending violence against women and to public safety by ensuring that your party votes to defeat this proposed legislation when it comes before the House.

Gun Control has made a difference in Canada

- Gun deaths have declined with stronger gun laws, dropping from 1125 in 1995 to fewer than 800 currently.
- The 2007 rate of murders with rifles and shotguns has dropped by more than 52 percent from 1995.
- Spousal homicides with firearms have plummeted from 27 in 1996 to 9 in 2007.
- Suicide rates, particularly among youth, have declined.

First responders including police, paramedics, public health, and victims' organizations support sensible gun control. Although women are a small percentage of Canada's 2 million gun owners, they account for a high percentage of the victims of gun violence. Access to a firearm is the fifth leading predictor of female homicide in domestic violence. The weapon of choice in such incidents is a rifle or a shotgun.

Mandatory screening, licensing and renewal for all firearm owners as well as registration of all firearms are important measures to protect women's safety. Renewable licenses reduce the risk that individuals with a history of domestic violence will have access to firearms. Registration ensures that the police can take preventative action and helps hold gun owners accountable for their firearms, reinforcing the licensing provisions. Canada's Supreme Court of Canada said that the registration provisions cannot be severed from the licensing provisions.

The proposed law would eliminate the requirement to register rifles and shotguns. A licensed owner can buy as many guns as he wishes without his name being associated with any gun through the registry. Such an owner (with a license) can give the firearm(s) to individuals *without* licenses.

Canada's police agencies currently use the registry *11000 times* daily to search for information about which individuals have guns and what guns they own so that they can enforce prohibition orders and support preventative action. Inquests conducted into the murders of women and children continue to recommend that gun owners be licensed and their guns registered to prevent further tragedies.

Women overwhelmingly support the licensing of gun owners and registration of all firearms. While the gun lobby is very vocal in its opposition, a recent Leger and Leger poll (December 2009) showed most Canadians support the registry including people living with gun owners (typically their wives). Access to rifles and shotguns in cases of domestic violence and suicide is a major public safety concern:

- 88 percent of the women that are killed with guns are killed with a shotgun or rifle;
- Access to guns is the fifth highest of 18 risk factors in spousal homicides;
- 50 percent of family homicides end when the murderer commits suicide;
- Screening in licensing and licence renewals for gun owners is essential to the protection of women and children;
- If a gun is used as a murder weapon there are more often multiple victims including children;
- Women and children are at greater at risk for gun related homicide in rural and western communities where opposition to gun control and registration is highest
- The Annual cost of violence against women is Over \$4 billion a year in Canada, the cost of the registry is \$4 million.

International experts maintain that governments have an obligation to regulate firearms in order to reduce the risks of violence. The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Small Arms have emphasized that states which do not adequately regulate firearms are failing to meet their obligations under international law, particularly with respect to the safety of women and children.

The stakes are high for women in Canada. Ending violence against women requires you to lead your party to reduce violence and suicide in our families and our communities, by defeating Bill C-391.

Signing in opposition to Bill C-391:

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