



News Release

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## Polytechnique students, graduates and victims reach out to Jack Layton through a billboard in his riding



**Toronto, September 16, 2010** — Students, graduates and families of the victims of l'École Polytechnique are unveiling a billboard in the heart of Jack Layton's riding (corner of Danforth and Bowden St.), pleading with the NDP leader to do everything in his power to prevent NDP MPs from helping the Conservatives from dismantling Canada's gun control law. Although Layton announced on Monday that he has persuaded enough NDP MPs to change their vote to kill C-391, the group maintains that the vote still too much close to call and that Mr. Layton must not give up on gaining securing more pro-registry votes amongst his MPs.

On September 22<sup>nd</sup>, Members of Parliament will vote on a motion to kill Bill C-391. The Private Members' Bill will end the registration of rifles and shotguns. Canada's gun control law which requires all gun owners to be licensed and all firearms to be registered was passed in 1995 in the wake of the 1989 massacre, after years of lobbying by Polytechnique students and victims, alongside police, public health and women's organizations. Bill C-391 passed second reading in November 2009 because 8 Liberals and 12 NDP MPs voted with the Conservatives. Since then, the Liberals have imposed a party line against the Bill. Jack Layton has refused to whip his caucus but has instead opted to persuade the 12 MPs to switch sides.

"Mr. Layton has convinced several of his MPs to change their vote to support the registry but the tally is much too close and we cannot take any chances," says Heidi Rathjen, spokesperson for the group. "He is counting on an ideal scenario where

every MP shows up and votes according to predictions. This is not reality. There are no guarantees and too many variables. What if an NDP MP fails to show up? What if a Liberal MP decides to abstain? What if someone gets sick? It's all happened before. Mr. Layton is making an enormous bet with peoples' lives. He may have saved face, but he has not saved the registry. Not yet. The Liberals and the Bloc québécois are ordering all their MPs to vote against C-391. Only the NDP has "available" votes to secure."

She adds: "That is why we are reminding Mr. Layton of the political risks of allowing his MPs to vote to dismantle the registry." In a last ditch effort to save the registry, the group paid for a billboard that calls on Jack Layton, a long time proponent of efforts to end violence against women and founder of the 'White Ribbon Campaign', to consider his legacy as leader of the NDP if Bill C-391 passes. The billboard asks "Jack" if he really intends on helping Stephen Harper destroy Canada's gun control law. It also asserts that "Wearing a white ribbon is not enough".

"Mr. Layton says he is personally in favour of maintaining the registry, and like Mr. Ignatieff has proposed improvements to accommodate concerns of rural and aboriginal voters. But these improvements cannot be introduced if Bill C-391 passes. Once the registry is gone we will not get it back."

**Suzanne Laplante-Edward**, mother of **Anne-Marie Edward** who was killed at l'École Polytechnique, says: "On December 6th, 1989, my life and that of my whole family was destroyed. We have never recovered from our loss. Every day required tremendous moral strength to get on with our lives. Along with other victims' families, we have worked for this law for over two decades. We did not do this for ourselves — our loss is permanent. We worked so that others would not have to live through the hell we experienced, and still do. We are doing this for other people's children, sisters, spouses and grandchildren. If Bill C-391 passes, the Ruger Mini-14 semi-automatic rifle that killed my daughter and 13 others in less than 25 minutes will be un-registered. Untraceable. Its ownership will be unknown to police. This is one of the "duck guns" that Steven Harper finds so inoffensive." She also said this to Mr. Layton: "Jack, if we lose the registry your 'White Ribbon Campaign' will become nothing but a bunch of meaningless small strips of white fabric. **Jack, it takes more than a white ribbon!**"

**Jim Edward**, father of **Anne-Marie**, who rarely speaks to the media, adds: "As soon as she was born, I loved Anne-Marie more than anything in the world, in a way only a father can understand. When she was killed, it was like the whole universe collapsed. Yet Anne-Marie is only one of hundreds of daughters and sons that die from gunshot wounds every year. These are not just statistics. Every one of these tragic, premature and preventable deaths is one too many. I am appealing to everyone that has ever been part of the NDP — card-carrying members, donors, voters, allies, anyone with any influence: Do whatever you can to convince Jack Layton and his caucus to vote in greater numbers against Bill C-391. All the information you need is at [www.Polysesouvient.ca](http://www.Polysesouvient.ca). Save another Anne-Marie. Save hundreds. Save the registry."

**Michaël Lapointe**, representing the **Polytechnique Student Association**, explained: "If a hunting rifle can kill a moose, it sure can kill a human. There is no reason why we should make an exception for these types of firearm. The debate is over. Every argument has been said and repeated over and over. The police have spoken, the public health experts have spoken, Canadians have spoken. It is time for our leaders to take position against Bill C-391. The question is: Will Jack Layton listen to our voices and secure enough NDP votes to save the firearms registry?"

**Hayder Kadhim**, who survived the Dawson shooting and who has been lobbying for gun control since the shooting four years ago, joined the group in solidarity. He says: "Jack Layton came to Dawson College after the tragedy to express his sympathy and embrace the victims. But we need more than tears and sympathy. We need him to show leadership and do everything in his power to stop Stephen Harper from dismantling the registry. Mr. Layton may lose a lot more than he realizes if the registry dies because of NDP votes. His legacy will be dismantling the gun registry and we will hold him personally responsible."

"The Conservatives 'Private Members' Bill' ploy and aggressive advertising and misinformation by the gun lobby have undermined support for the registry. They have resources and we don't. Unlike the Conservatives, we can't afford to pay for 20 billboards and countless ads on the radio. But we have to fight for the registry in any way we can. We hope that this one billboard will remind Mr. Layton of what is at stake and strengthen his resolve to ensure that NDP votes do not enable this bill to pass."

Last week, the Group went to Quebec City to call on Quebec Conservatives, pointing out the hypocrisy of Candice Hoepfner and other Conservatives who cry for MPs to "listen to their constituents". Those eleven Conservatives from Quebec are still planning to vote against the will of *their* constituents.