

## Jack, do what's right for Canada

September 11, 2010

*The following is excerpted from an open letter sent this week to NDP Leader Jack Layton by Patricia Freeman Marshall, former co-chair of the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, and Peter Jaffe, academic director of the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women:*

Dear Jack,

You have spoken proudly in the past of the ways you have supported women's safety as a founder of the White Ribbon Committee. Now the women of Canada need you activate that support and assert your leadership in the defeat of Bill C-391 to abolish the gun registry.

You say you have been listening to hunters and you quote them with great enthusiasm. Why have you not been listening as carefully to the women's organizations, . . . to physicians, the Canadian Labour Congress, police associations and even to your own knowledge of women's experience of violence involving the rifles and shotguns in their homes? In the past, you and the NDP have demonstrated a good understanding of the complex realities of the violence Canadian women experience in their lives. Where has that knowledge disappeared to over the summer?

You know that homicide rates for women in rural communities across Canada are higher because of the availability of guns. You know that, while many gun owners use their weapons responsibly, women in those same rural communities are painfully aware that the shotguns and rifles in their homes are not just used for duck and moose hunting. Their injured and sometimes fatally wounded bodies are, too often, the damning evidence. . . .

You and your party have the statistics to belie the Conservative stance that the registry is "useless" and a "black hole." Gun-related homicide rates during the years the registry has been in operation have fallen drastically and the rates of spousal homicides by long guns, of which women are most often the victims, show a large, very welcome decrease. . . .

This is not the time to abdicate your leadership. From the National Rifle Association of America website, we learn that the Canadian Shooting Sports Association has a stronger hold on some of your caucus members presently than you do. They must be reminded that their constituents in rural communities are not just the hunters but also all the women and men who support the registry. . . .

You have been described in the past by many, including us, as a man of integrity, but you now seem to have veered into a course of political expediency. We are very concerned that the harms from your present inaction could resonate well into the future. You still have an opportunity to change all that, Jack Layton. Make your leadership count. Your legacy is being written in this hour. Remember your white ribbon. Do what is right for Canada.