



## This time we can vote positive for children

### **What we want**

We want child care funding ramped up to \$5 billion by 2010 and we want a \$2 billion capital fund to create 200,000 non-profit community child care spaces.

We want a national Early Learning and Child Care Act to ensure the funding is sustained and to ensure that each provincial/territorial government is required to use the federal child care funds to build a public and accountable child care system that is high quality, inclusive, affordable, universally accessible and not-for-profit.

We want expanded maternity/parental benefits to include self-employed parents and students to replace 75 per cent of lost income. We want an end to child poverty and we want a more equal distribution of income. We need progressive taxation, government income transfers to households, as well as improved public services and unemployment insurance.

The federal government must support a strategy for child care workers to improve wages, working conditions and training to ensure a high quality child care system.

The federal government needs to provide support for children by promoting a liveable minimum wage, increasing the supply of affordable, safe housing and supporting local programs to promote healthy, active living. We need a child tax benefit that is not clawed back.

### **How the Liberals have failed children**

The Liberals have set themselves up to be the defenders of children but they have dropped the ball. They have failed to pass legislation for a high quality, public, accessible and accountable child care system. Children are suffering because they still don't have access to quality child care programs.

Tentative steps have been taken with the bilateral agreements but there is nothing in place to secure long-term, adequate public funding that moves us away from user fees towards direct funding of accountable, regulated not-for-profit child care services.

There is nothing in the Liberal platform on child care to develop such a system and it is a step backwards from the government's current funding commitments. The danger of big box corporate child care looms without any action to help foster and protect non-profit and public child care.

The majority of young children in Canada are still being looked after through unregulated and informal arrangements. Regulated child care spaces were available to only 15.5 per cent of children in Canada, yet 75 per cent of mothers with young children are employed and need access to child care.

The number of poor children has increased 20 per cent since the federal Liberal government's pledge to eliminate child poverty. Today, more than 1.2 million children in Canada live in poverty. More than half of the women who are sole parents are poor and so are their children. Nothing has been done to address this deplorable situation. In fact, it has been made much worse by the massive social program cuts instituted by Paul Martin when he was finance minister.

Women and mothers are poor because they are under-employed and paid low wages. The federal Liberal and Conservative parties are pursuing a privatization agenda. Privatization is forcing women out of better paid, public sector jobs into privatized, low-wage, non-union positions. These actions are hurting women, but they are also hurting children.

Funding cuts and downloading of responsibilities have put huge strains on the budgets of provincial and municipal governments and they have in turn cut funding for education, public health and recreation. The percentage of food bank clients who are children has risen to 40.7 per cent.

Physical inactivity among children and youth is reaching epidemic proportions. More than half of children and youth are not active enough for optimal growth and development. Physical inactivity and unhealthy eating have become public health issues, yet the federal Liberals have done nothing to address the problem.

Canada's children are victims of Liberal fiscal, economic and social policies. There was no need for the massive cuts imposed by Martin. While he was finance minister, the overall economy grew. But children did not benefit from that growth. Thanks to Martin the rich got richer while poverty increased, leaving kids behind.

## **Why the Conservatives would be worse**

The Conservatives would undo the little progress that has been made in child care by transferring funds directly to parents. Paying parents \$1,200 a year for child care will not build a child care system. It's not child care – it is a tax deduction – and a political leader should know the difference.

The tax credit proposal by the Conservatives will not create high quality spaces in the non-profit system. It is an open invitation to the big box child care corporations. This kind of approach will only further weaken and fragment the child care system.

Child poverty isn't even mentioned in the Conservative party policy declaration. Conservative Leader Stephen Harper is on record as opposing "new money for social assistance in the name of 'child poverty'." In the House of Commons, Harper said, "Our position generally has been to recognize the need for reduction in the area of federal transfers and specifically in the area of welfare."

In 1994, he congratulated the Reform party for its efforts to push the Liberals further to the right. He said there had been many "positive" developments as a result. "Universality has been severely reduced. It is virtually dead as a concept in most areas of public policy. The family allowance program has been eliminated and unemployment insurance has been seriously cut back."

## **What the New Democrats say**

The NDP promotes the idea of an early child care and education program that is national in scope and available to all children. They have committed to fight for legislation to ensure the funding is sustained and to build a non-profit and public system. This plan would cover pre and post-natal care, early learning and child care. It would support parents both at home and in the labour market.

The program would be integrated, accessible, non-profit and high quality, assured by national standards. The NDP believes child care workers deserve decent wages.

The NDP says it is more important to eliminate child poverty than give tax breaks to banks. NDP Leader Jack Layton wants to see an increase in the Child Tax Benefit. He says low-income families receiving that benefit should not have their social assistance benefits "clawed back."

The New Democrats advocate a national housing strategy so that every child has adequate, safe and secure shelter.

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