



Federal Election 2011

WOMEN'S EQUALITY

Harper Conservatives' Record

Stephen Harper has undermined women's equality since he was first elected in 2006. His first act was to cancel the early learning and child care agreements, which would have begun the process of making early learning and child care more affordable and accessible for women and their families.

The Harper government has cut funding to Status of Women Canada by 37 per cent. It has also cut the funding of many important women's equality groups including: Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, Womenspace, the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, the New Brunswick Coalition for Pay Equity, le Conseil d'intervention pour l'accès des femmes au travail, the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses, Réseau des tables régionales de groupes de femmes du Québec, and Action travail des femmes.

It's a long list, and the result is that many women no longer have a national voice. With only 22 per cent of our Parliament represented by women and so few women in the Harper cabinet, Canadian women's organizations play a critical role in raising the issues that impact women's lives.

The Harper Conservatives also work against women's equality through budget measures. The latest example was the announcement of income splitting for couples with children. Only 13 per cent of all Canadian families are headed by couples with a single earner making enough to meet the guidelines, so only the richest among them will accrue any significant tax savings. The biggest winners from income splitting are higher-income male breadwinners.

Income-splitting does nothing for those who are most in need: single parents, unattached individuals, and families with no employed members or with self-employed members.

Conservative MPs have consistently organized to scrap the long-gun registry, ignoring women's fears that the move will lead to spousal homicides. While firearms were used in approximately 40 per cent of murders of women in 1989, they now account for less than 15 per cent, in part due to stricter controls on firearms. Harper recently announced that if he had a majority he would scrap the long-gun registry.

In short, women's equality has eroded under successive Harper led governments.

The Facts

- The 2010 World Economic Forum reported that Canada ranked 20 in global gender equality, down from 14 in 2006.
- The earning gap ranking in 2010 tells a more alarming story with Canada at 33rd place. The estimated average earned income for Canadian women is \$28,315, compared with \$40,000 for men.
- In 2009, 73 per cent of Canadian mothers with children under the age of 16 living at home were in the paid workforce with 64 per cent of mothers with children under age three participating.
- Women's employment is more insecure, part-time, and temporary. Even though women's unemployment rate is 6.5 per cent compared to men at 6.9 per cent, only 33 per cent of women qualify for employment insurance compared to 44 per cent for men.
- Women's poverty portrait grows more worrisome. According to the Ad hoc Coalition for Women's Equality, 52.1 per cent of single mothers with children under six live in poverty. In 2008, almost one in nine children and their families lived in poverty and one in four aboriginal children live in poverty.
- According to Statistics Canada, Aboriginal women are also seven times more likely to be murdered than non-

Aboriginal women in Canada. Research conducted by the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) demonstrates that Aboriginal women and girls are as likely to be killed by a stranger or an acquaintance as they are by an intimate partner—very different from the experiences of non-Aboriginal women in Canada, whose homicide rates are often attributed to intimate partner violence.

Better Choices

The poverty experienced by women would be significantly alleviated with a genuine commitment and investment in First Nations communities; our education and health systems; national early learning and child care programs, long term care, affordable housing and transit strategies.

Investment in job creation in female dominated sectors such as health care, education, child care, social services and long term care would significantly benefit families and communities.

Reversal of the corporate tax cuts and their reallocation toward the implementation of a national, affordable child care plan or expanded EI benefits would be an important step towards increasing government support for women.