

Harper Needs to Put Women and Children First^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Linda is a woman who lives in Ottawa. Until recently, she had a well-paying job. She had just won a prestigious promotion when her life turned upside down: her elderly mother fell seriously ill and needed round-the-clock nursing care. Linda searched for homecare she could afford, but found none. In the end, she quit her job to take care of her mother, just years shy of her own retirement.

There are many women like Linda across Canada. Like never before, families are feeling the squeeze of inadequate support for seniors, shaky retirement savings, skyrocketing tuition, and lack of affordable childcare. Women and their families are increasingly shouldering these burdens without assistance from the federal government.

Linda's story is one example of the way in which Stephen Harper's government has abandoned women in Canada. People like Linda are part of the real majority of Canadians whose realities are not a priority for Harper's Conservative majority. The current government's policies are actually significant setbacks to the strides women have taken towards equality in the last generation. From attacks on the right to equal pay to cancelling childcare agreements with the provinces, the Harper government has sent a clear signal that in its books, issues affecting women are not important.

We must never forget that despite all the progress we've made in ensuring equality and economic security for women, there will always be some among us who want to go backwards. Harper's recent salvo on our retirement security is one clear example of that.

Many Canadians are looking for a different government, one that will work with women and their families to ensure someone like Linda can continue to prosper in her career while her mother can live in comfort and dignity. These Canadians are looking for a government that gives families a break with lower tuition fees, ensuring that quality post-secondary education is within reach for youth in Canada and a government that invests in affordable, accessible, quality, not-for-profit childcare, which gives women the opportunity to fully participate in the job market. Canada needs a government that finally takes targeted measures to address poverty and homelessness, which are still persistent threats to too many women and their families.

It's time for leadership that gives women a place at the heart of our democracy, our economy, our communities, and our future as a country. Across the country, that's the positive message we, as New Democrats, have to take to the next 70 ridings we need to win in order to form Canada's first social democratic majority government. We must reach out to women and their families and offer them a government that represents the real majority of Canadians.

New Democrats have a long and proud feminist tradition that spans from fights for childcare, pay equity, reproductive choice, and legal reform, to electing the first woman to lead a national political party, to electing an historic number of women candidates in the 2011 election. This commitment to the advancement of women is both a core value and a practical strategy: New Democrats know that when women can fully participate, Canada is a stronger and more caring country.

Canada must also do much more to prevent violence against women and support survivors. Every woman has the right to be safe at home and in the community; but the tragic reality is that half of all Canadian women will experience violence at least once in their lives. Community organizations that support women have been left to deal with a huge need for services on shoestring budgets -- and the unacceptable result is that over 400 women were turned away from shelters on an average day in 2010.

Many organizations across the country are doing innovative work to engage women in the political process, but under Stephen Harper funding has been severely curtailed. It's time to change that, beginning by boosting funding for women's organizations and removing rules that prevent them from doing advocacy if they receive federal funds. From the community level to the halls of Parliament, a key way to build a better Canada is by putting more women on the ballot, in Cabinet, and at the highest levels of government.

Linda's story, and the stories of many women in Canada, will have a better ending if we work together to put women at the centre of our politics.

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Region: Canada^[2]

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women's labour force participation^[4]

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