

National think-tank unveils platform to end inequality in Canada

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EXCERPTS

As federal politicians compete for the middle-class vote, a national think-tank has launched an election platform aimed at reducing the gap between Canada's rich and poor.

The four-point strategy to end income inequality focuses on good jobs, a good safety net, good public programs and progressive taxation — and invites voters to “cast a vote that is good for Canada.”

“Our team of economists and research associates has been tracking the worsening of income inequality since we launched our Growing Gap research project in 2006,” Bruce Campbell, executive director of the left-leaning Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, said in a statement.

“Now we're advancing a platform as an actionable blueprint for moving forward.”

The platform, which draws heavily on the centre's latest Alternative Federal Budget, contemplates what Canada would look like “if we invested in the things that could solve income inequality” such as universal child care, national pharmacare and affordable college and university tuition.

The provocative presentation, posted on the centre's website, includes videos of six Canadians who describe their personal struggles with unemployment, lack of public services and the country's tax system.

The platform supplies “the solutions,” while Canadian voters “have the power” to vote for policies that are good for Canada, the presentation says.

While there is no plan to compile a score sheet or tell voters which party to support, some of the party leaders have already announced policies that match planks in the platform, said David Macdonald, a senior economist with the centre.

For example, both the NDP and the Liberals have vowed to launch an inquiry into Canada's missing and murdered indigenous women.

However, some party promises, such as the NDP, Conservative and Green pledges to lower taxes for small businesses, run counter to the centre's platform, which calls for them to be increased to 15 per cent from 11 per cent.

“It's a means by which voters can compare the different platforms to see what is out there and what progressive measures might be missing,” Macdonald said in an interview.

“We're saying, here's a very progressive platform that is fully costed, and leave it up to voters to decide which party best reflects that.”

University of Toronto professor David Hulchanski, who studies inequality in Canadian cities, said the website was clear, easy to use and gives voters “something to think about.”

Nothing in the platform — including fairer taxation, affordable child care and inheritance taxes for the extremely wealthy — is particularly new for Western Europe and Scandinavia, he noted.

But these policies may be possible to achieve in Canada only through an electoral system based on proportional representation, and not the current first-past-the-post system where a party can govern with as little as 39 per cent of the popular vote, Hulchanski added.

Good Jobs

- Retrain down-sized workers.
- Ensure the federal minimum wage is within 60 per cent of average industrial wage.
- Reserve 20 per cent of federally funded infrastructure jobs for youth.

- Invest \$500 million annually for First Nations training and employment.
- Support collective bargaining.
- Create incentives for employers to hire, train and promote workers from marginalized groups.
- Create a national affordable tuition plan.

Good Safety Net

- Fix Employment Insurance.
- Increase Canada Pension plan by 200 per cent.
- Cancel income-splitting for seniors and boost the Guaranteed Income Supplement for low-income seniors.
- Restore eligibility for Old Age Security to age 65 instead of 67.
- Launch a national plan to help people with disabilities.
- Double the National Child Benefit Supplement to reduce child poverty by 26 per cent and lift 236,000 kids out of poverty.
- Work with provinces to create a national anti-poverty strategy.

Good Public Programs

- Create a national affordable housing strategy.
- Implement \$10-a-day child care.
- Launch national pharmacare program.
- Introduce national dental care for children under age 15.
- Enact a national plan to address violence against women and launch inquiry on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.
- Create a Green Infrastructure Fund.

Progressive Taxation

- Restore corporate tax rate to 22 per cent, just below the 2006 rate.
- Increase small business taxes to 15 per cent from 11 per cent.
- Introduce a new tax bracket of 35 per cent on incomes above \$250,000.
- Tax income from capital gains the same as employment income.
- Implement a financial transaction tax.
- Eliminate the tax exemption for corporate meals and entertainment expenses such as private boxes at sports events.
- Introduce an inheritance tax of 45 per cent on inheritances worth \$5 million or more.

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