



THE PINK BOOK:

*A Policy Framework for
Canada's Future*

Volume 1

Liberal Women's Caucus, 2006

The National Liberal Women's Caucus has long been an active and passionate voice for Canadian women. Today, that voice is required more than ever as the Conservative government pursues an ideological agenda that ignores the needs of many women and cuts the funding of groups dedicated to those who need help most.

The Pink Book: A Policy Framework for Canada's Future, Volume 1, describes a different direction – a progressive course that is essential not only to the advancement of Canadian women, but to the success of our country in the years ahead. We believe that a future Liberal government must focus its efforts on advancing the equality and economic status of women. Within this document you will find ideas and recommendations designed to achieve those goals – and to improve in other ways the lives of women and families across the nation.

The Pink Book serves as a first volume of policy recommendations and is based on meetings of the Liberal Women's Caucus during the summer and fall. Further volumes will be forthcoming after more gatherings and conversations with Canadian women, women's groups and all those who seek to improve the lives of women and families – including representatives of provincial and territorial governments – who can play such a crucial role in helping to achieve social and economic progress.



Canada has made strides toward greater equality, but the current government has put that success and further needed progress at risk. That is why the women members of the Liberal caucus – and indeed the party as a whole – are determined to bring forth new ideas, exert new pressure and attract more women to political office to help make the case for more progressive and beneficial policies.

Our ultimate goal is a better society for women and families – a society based on our Canadian values of justice and equality.

I wish to thank the members of the Liberal Women's Caucus for their dedication, spirit and vision in working to create the policy recommendations in *The Pink Book*. I am proud to be a member of the caucus and to be associated with its effort and commitment.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Belinda Stronach'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent loop at the end.

Hon. Belinda Stronach, P.C., M.P. (Newmarket-Aurora)
Chair, National Liberal Women's Caucus



The work of the Liberal Women's Caucus could not be more important than it is now, when we see the Conservative government trying to turn back the clock on the progress women have gained in gender equality issues.

By slashing almost half the funding from the operating budget of Status of Women Canada, the Conservatives are attacking a national agency that promotes women's equality and the full participation of women in the economic, social, cultural and political life of our country. Status of Women Canada works to better the economic situation of women, to eliminate systemic violence against women and children and to advance the cause of women's rights.

We must challenge this detrimental decision made by the Conservatives. I'm proud of the efforts of my colleagues in the Liberal Women's Caucus to stand up and speak out for women across the country and to promote policies that will improve the lives of women. *The Pink Book, A Policy Framework for Canada's Future, Volume 1*, is another important step in having the voices of women in Canada heard.

Sincerely,

Hon. Judy Sgro, P.C., M.P. (York West), Chair,
House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women

The recent cuts to Status of Women Canada and removal of the goal of equality from the mandate of the Women's Program speaks volumes about the Conservative government's regressive approach to women and women's concerns.

In their parliamentary and constituency work and, as outlined in *The Pink Book: A Policy Framework for Canada's Future, Volume 1*, the Liberal Women's Caucus advocates for all women. In particular, our focus is on women whose voices are often not heard: working women, women with families, elderly women, Aboriginal women and women from our cultural communities.

The policy priorities of the Women's Liberal Caucus are important to securing and improving hard-won rights for all women in Canada.

Sincerely,

Maria Minna

*Hon. Maria Minna, P.C., M.P. (Beaches-East York),
Critic for Status of Women*





The Pink Book: A Policy Framework for Canada's Future, Volume 1, is a first step in focussing attention on the broader issues that affect all women in Canada, and by extension, Aboriginal women.

First Nations, Inuit and Métis women in Canada face unique challenges in achieving social and economic progress. We are pleased that the Liberal Women's Caucus recognizes these needs and has responded to them.

There is much that needs to be done, especially in light of the Conservative government's cuts to programs that give voice to communities whose issues are not often heard. We would like to thank our caucus colleagues who have worked so diligently on these issues and we look forward to our continued work with Aboriginal women across Canada to ensure that they are represented in the policy directions of the Liberal Party and a new Liberal government.

Sincerely,

Anita Neville, M.P. (Winnipeg South Centre), Critic for Aboriginal Affairs
Nancy Karetak-Lindell, M.P. (Nunavut)
Tina Keeper, M.P. (Churchill)

Women in Canada share a bond in dealing with issues of social and economic equality, but women in our cultural and immigrant communities often face circumstances that are uniquely different.

The discussions and recommendations of the Liberal Women's Caucus in *The Pink Book: A Policy Framework for Canada's Future, Volume 1*, acknowledge and are sensitive to these special situations. We have worked very hard to address the equality and economic issues that touch all women, and especially those in our multicultural communities. The policies supported by our caucus will improve the lives of ethnocultural, racialized and immigrant women.

Liberals are committed to seeing increased representation of these communities in Parliament. For this, we would like to thank our colleagues in the Liberal Women's Caucus and all Liberal women for their efforts, vision and ongoing commitment to getting more women from all backgrounds elected to the House of Commons.



Sincerely,

Ruby Dhalla, M.P. (Brampton-Springdale)

Hon. Marlene Jennings, P.C., M.P. (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce-Lachine)

Yasmin Ratansi, M.P. (Don Valley East)

Preface

From establishing the principle of equal pay for women, to enshrining equality in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the leadership of women has been crucial in pursuing the goals of economic and social equality.

These ideals have been fought for by our mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers and all those who strived for a better life for women and their families.

We owe them an enormous debt that can only be honoured by continuing to cherish the Canadian values they held and by carrying on the work to build a better Canada for all of our people.

This is the spirit which infused the National Liberal Women's Caucus when members from all parts of Canada and many of our cultural communities met in working sessions in July, 2006, to build for the future based on the achievements of the past. *The Pink Book: A Policy Framework for Canada's Future, Volume 1*, is the outcome of these and subsequent discussions.

The goal of the sessions was to develop a list of priority policy recommendations to deal with some of today's most pressing economic and social issues facing women and our families. The discussions were intense and focused on immediate priorities that would be helpful, particularly to working women, women with young children and senior women.

Out of these working sessions, we dedicated ourselves to building a Canada where true equality exists for all women and men and the principles of fairness and justice are embedded in the policies of the federal government.

The *Pink Book: A Policy Framework for Canada's Future, Volume 1*, contains the policy recommendations from these sessions that are aimed at improving the social and economic conditions of working women, women taking care of children and elders and senior women including Aboriginal, ethnocultural, racialized and immigrant women who often face unique challenges in our society.

The Liberal Women's Caucus, while forging specific policies directed at these groups, has a larger agenda of issues which will continue to develop as progress is achieved on the issues at hand.


The policies of the Conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper are detrimental and damaging to women and threaten the hard-won gains made in past decades.

We believe a new Liberal government needs to reverse this Conservative government's decisions, particularly in relation to the recent budget cuts and new policy directives for Status of Women Canada.




In dealing with the most pressing economic and social issues, the members of the Liberal Women's Caucus know and understand the difficulties facing women today. We too have experienced them in our own relationships, in our families and in our workplaces. We know and understand that women are looking to us as members of the community and as elected representatives to find solutions to problems that often seem overwhelming to individuals. We know and understand how a national government committed to the principles of economic and social equality can help in overcoming barriers and reducing poverty.

This is the task we have set, this is the challenge we need to grasp to honour the debt owed to all those women who struggled to make our lives better.




Our discussions among ourselves and with Canadian women have led us to prioritize our policy goals, and they are guided by the principles of addressing the need for equality and improving the economic status of women. These twin principles are the beacon for the Liberal Women's Caucus and will light our path as we move forward to other concerns in this evolving agenda. We will continue to meet and dialogue with women, women's organizations and with all those who want to improve the lives of women and their families. The Pink Book: A Policy Framework for Canada's Future, Volume 1 is the first in what will be a series of policy positions in key areas.



While our discussions in 2006 were broad-ranging and detailed, the Liberal Women's Caucus decided to focus on three broad policy areas where the impact on women and families can be the most far-reaching and profound. They are early learning and child care, income security and improved maternity and parental benefits. Each of these broad policy areas produced a host of specific reforms across a number of fronts.

The main policy document from the Liberal Women's Caucus presents the ideas and arguments for the policy recommendations in detail. This preface summarizes some of the main conclusions and steps needed to be taken by a new Liberal government.



We look forward to the feedback and ideas from concerned citizens across Canada. We can be reached via the National Liberal Women's Caucus directory included in this book or via email at info@pinkbook.ca.

CHILD CARE AND EARLY LEARNING

The Liberal Women's Caucus supports a realistic and helpful approach to benefit working women caring for young children or elderly parents. One of the aspects of modern life is the issue of "time poverty" facing women who are caregivers. The unpaid work in raising children or caring for others can make women vulnerable to poverty. Often, women don't have the time or energy to devote to income-earning activities.

The Liberal plan for early learning and child care is best suited to addressing the needs of women and families. This plan must continue to be the centrepiece of Liberal government policy. The Conservative government approach of \$100 a month cannot build an affordable, high-quality early learning and child care system that everyone can access.

The Liberal Women's Caucus recommends that a new Liberal government honour the previous bilateral agreements with the provinces and territories for \$1 billion a year over five years in early learning and child care.

To fully meet the needs of working women and young families, a new Liberal government needs, as a long term goal, to devote federal financial support equivalent to one per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to early learning and child care. This is the target established by the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) in its report entitled *Starting Strong II*.

To further help working women and families, a new Liberal government should use the \$100 a month under the Conservative government to boost the Canadian Child Tax Benefit. It would mean an additional \$1,200 each year for the majority of Canadian families.

A new Liberal government should use the value of the Spousal Credit, a tax deduction for a spouse at home, to be paid directly to the spouse who, in the majority of instances, would be a woman.



INCOME SECURITY

Unfortunately, women in Canada earn 71 cents for every dollar that men earn. This wage gap has not changed substantially in the past decade. Regardless of their educational achievements, women continue to have earnings well below those of men. This means a heightened risk of poverty for children and for women in their retirement years. In the latest statistics, 47.1 per cent of single-parent families were poor and more than one-third of single women over 65 lived in poverty.

Prime Minister Harper, once said "pay equity" is "a rip-off", and clearly, the Conservative government is not providing leadership to help women improve their economic status.

The Liberal Women's Caucus believes a new Liberal government should implement new proactive pay equity legislation as recommended in a 2004 federal *Pay Equity Task Force report*.

To address the issue of senior women so they can live in dignity and security, the Liberal Women's Caucus believes a number of policy changes need to be brought into being by a new Liberal government.

Among them:

"Notwithstanding anything in this Charter, the rights and freedoms referred to in it are guaranteed equally to male and female persons."
Section 28.

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Allow seniors to earn income, including RRSP withdrawals, of up to 10 per cent of the benefits received under Old Age Security (OAS) and Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS). This would mean approximately \$1,400 in benefit to all seniors.

A range of other benefits provided by the federal government could be moderated to improve the economic position of seniors.

To ease the burden on women and other caregivers, a new Liberal government should invest \$1 billion over five years to develop a national caregiver agenda. The provinces and territories need to be partners with the national government to move forward in this area.

As a further help to caregivers, a new Liberal government should extend the Canada Pension Plan drop-out provision to unpaid caregivers. This measure will improve the economic security for those who leave the workplace to provide care for their family members.

IMPROVED MATERNITY AND PARENTAL BENEFITS

The Liberal government in 2001 improved maternity/parental benefits, extending the Employment Insurance benefit for families to one year. It was a progressive and beneficial decision for families and children, but there are shortfalls and not all mothers have access to the EI benefit. Often, the financial benefit is inadequate.

This is a complex area and raises a host of issues. The Liberal Women's Caucus believes that the province of Quebec has the best model for addressing the needs of families and women under the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP). The Plan deals with maternity benefits, parental benefits and adoption benefits. We believe the Quebec plan can be used as a model for discussions with the provinces and territories.

2.6 million female Canadians lived on low incomes in 2004, compared with 2.2 million males.




The Liberal Women's Caucus believes a new Liberal government should open these discussions as soon as possible to build an improved income replacement plan for parents, including self-employed individuals.

The Pink Book: A Policy Framework for Canada's Future, Volume 1, contains the initial policy recommendations stemming from the working sessions of the Liberal Women's Caucus. This policy document is not meant to be conclusive or the end of the efforts of the Liberal Women's Caucus to deal with the reality of women's lives in Canada, rather this represents a beginning.

It is a window on the kind of Canada the women of the Liberal Party want to build in partnership with Canadians. As we move forward, we recognize the need to continue to collaborate with Canadian women and men, to seek solutions that make sense and are beneficial to Canadians and to help women and all Canadians realize their potential in building a better world.

THE PINK BOOK:

A Policy Framework for Canada's Future, Volume 1

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- Women in Canada form more than half – 53.9 per cent of the low-income population.
 - 47.1 per cent of single-parent families headed by women are poor.
 - 37 per cent of women of colour are low-income, compared with 19 per cent of all women.
 - The average annual income of Aboriginal women is \$13,300, compared to \$18,200 for Aboriginal men and \$19,350 for non-Aboriginal women.
 - 36 years after Royal Commission recommendations for legislative change for equal pay for work of equal value, women still earn approximately 71 per cent of what men earn for full-year, full-time work.

Introduction

Building upon the work done over many years by Liberal women Parliamentarians, the policy ideas in *The Pink Book: A Policy Framework for Canada's Future, Volume 1*, emerged from the working sessions at the Women's Caucus summer retreat in July of 2006. The goal of the sessions was to develop a list of priority policy recommendations that deal with some of the most pressing issues facing women in Canada and their families. The members of the Liberal Women's Caucus stand firmly behind the positions presented in this document and will advocate for their inclusion in government policies with a new Liberal government.


The Liberal Women's Caucus recognizes that women are equal under the law but do not have equality in their daily lives. Caucus members are committed to building a Canada where true equality exists for all women and men and the principals of fairness and justice are embedded in all federal government initiatives. The Liberal Women's Caucus believes that the implementation of the proposed policies in this document will contribute to fulfilling the equality provisions of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and Canada's international commitments to women found in, for example, the *UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW).

The issues outlined in *The Pink Book: A Policy Framework for Canada's Future, Volume 1*, have been selected as priorities for economic and social equality, but the list is not exhaustive. The Liberal Women's Caucus considers *The Pink Book: A Policy Framework for Canada's Future, Volume 1*, to be part of an evolving agenda and looks forward to further consulting with women's organizations and individual citizens from across the country on these and other important issues.



Some of the longer-term challenges to which the Liberal Women's Caucus is committed include:

- legislation and policies that support safe and healthy communities.
- the relationship between women and the environment.
- gender-based analysis.
- affordable housing.
- support for women fleeing abusive relationships.
- access to civil legal aid.
- bridge-to-work programs for immigrants.
- increased support for literacy programs.



The Pink Book: A Policy Framework for Canada's Future, Volume 1, *addresses some of the issues related to social and economic security facing women at various stages of their lives – as mothers of young children with a commitment to Early Learning and Child Care; as working women with a recognition of time poverty and time taken out of the workforce for maternity leave and caregiving, and as senior women with recommendations for pension reform that would permit greater income and better quality of life.*

ETHNOCULTURAL, RACIALIZED AND IMMIGRANT WOMEN

While not explicitly stated, all policy suggestions in this document take into consideration the unique circumstances of ethnocultural, racialized and immigrant women. At the same time, the Liberal Women's Caucus recognizes that there is an urgent need to design specific programs to assist these women to successfully integrate into Canadian society.



Liberal Women's Caucus supports the policy recommendation of the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada (NOIVMWC) that government policies must look at: "providing sufficient access to profession-specific language training, skills upgrading and back to work mentoring and bridging programs" for these groups.

ABORIGINAL WOMEN

The Liberal Women's Caucus recognizes the many unique challenges confronting Aboriginal women whose reality often includes acts of racism and sexual violence, extreme poverty, lack of access to adequate housing, overt racism and chronic health problems. Aboriginal women are the highest at-risk population in Canada. The systemic discrimination they endure is based both on their Aboriginal status and their gender.

As a first step, the Liberal Women's Caucus endorses providing "financial resources to Aboriginal women's organizations at the same level as their male-led counterparts." Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) recommends this measure.

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT: STATUS OF WOMEN CANADA AND THE COURT CHALLENGES PROGRAM

The funding cuts to Status of Women by the current minority Conservative government occurred after the summer discussions, but given the severity of these measures, the Liberal Women's Caucus feels compelled to speak out. The Conservative government has begun a systematic, ideologically-driven campaign to dismantle programs that help give voice to women's issues. Liberal Women's Caucus members are united in our concern that the 43 per cent cut to the operating budget, the removal of "equality" as a goal of the Women's Program, and the elimination of funding for domestic advocacy activities will dramatically impact the ability of Status of Women Canada to carry out its mandate, thereby impacting women across Canada.



The Liberal Women's Caucus strongly recommends to a new Liberal government that action must be taken to repair the damage done by this Conservative government's policies to Status of Women Canada. In particular, the Liberal Women's Caucus is calling for:

- Designating "equality" as the main goal of the Women's Program.
- Reinstating the Terms and Conditions of the Women's Program as they were before the Conservative changes.
- Ensuring that the funding under the Women's Program is only available to not-for-profit groups.
- Reversing the 43 per cent cut to the operating budget of Status of Women Canada.
- Increasing funding to the Women's Program at Status of Women by a minimum of 25 per cent.
- Revising the funding to organizations by introducing a mix of core funding to allow for long-term planning and project funding.


The cancellation of the Court Challenges Program is another recent development that must be addressed. This ideologically-based action by the Conservative government will make it more difficult for thousands of Canadians to exercise their constitutional rights. Through this action, access to justice for all Canadians will be severely eroded and especially so for women and Francophone minorities.

A coalition of national, provincial and local organizations in a letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper (October 2, 2006) stated: "When a country like Canada enacts constitutional rights it takes for granted that residents, when they believe the government is violating their rights, can and will challenge the offending law or policy. If residents cannot use their rights because of financial barriers, then Canada's constitutional democracy is hollow."

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's cuts to Status of Women Canada and the Women's Program are a direct and deliberate reversal of his January, 2006, pledge to "support women's human rights" and to "take concrete and immediate measures, as recommended by the United Nations, to ensure that Canada fully upholds its commitments to women in Canada."

The Liberal Women's Caucus is committed to the reinstatement of the Court Challenges Program.

FIRST PRINCIPLES: THE ONGOING STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY



Women need equality to be able to fully participate in the economic, social, political and cultural life of the country. Equality under the law was achieved for women in 1981 with the inclusion of an equality provision in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which states: "Notwithstanding anything in this Charter, the rights and freedoms referred to in it are guaranteed equally to male and female persons."

The enormous progress toward equality achieved by women over the past thirty years has stalled under Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative agenda, and will be reversed unless the needs of women are moved to the forefront of the public agenda.

Working-age women need help to balance their family responsibilities with work, be it caring for children, and/or elderly family members. Single-parent families headed by females need even more support. Aboriginals, immigrants, refugees and women with disabilities struggle daily just to meet basic needs for themselves and their families.




Throughout the years, the struggle for women's equality has been a struggle for basic human rights. Major achievements include: securing the right to vote; winning the historic legal case on the right to be considered "persons"; ratification of international agreements like the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)*;¹ and the right to equal pay for work of equal value (*Equality for Women: Beyond the Illusion, The Expert Panel on Accountability Mechanisms for Gender Equality Final Report – December 2005*).

The disadvantaged situation of women in society is the result of many interconnected factors. A recent paper published by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW) investigated the complexities of poverty and states that: "...women's poverty can not be addressed through band-aid solutions. Instead, pro-active poverty elimination must be based on recognizing the interconnected barriers that make certain groups of women more vulnerable than others. Women try to secure a decent quality of life but systemic inequalities make it difficult for them."



The members of the Liberal Women's Caucus understand the complex nature of women's poverty and violence. But, as Parliamentarians working in a political environment, we must seek a balance between what we would like to do and what is possible. To put it simply, choices had to be made.



*The Liberal Women's Caucus agreed, as first principles, to support policies under a framework of equality and poverty reduction. Out of these first principles, *The Pink Book: A Policy Framework for Canada's Future*, Volume 1, focuses on the policies of:*

- (1) Early learning and child care;*
- (2) Income security reform; and*
- (3) Employment insurance.*

¹ 2006 marks the 25th anniversary of Canada's ratification of CEDAW. Canada ratified this Convention in 1982 with the consent of all provinces and territories. During the 2006 federal election, all major federal party leaders made public commitments to take concrete and immediate measures to ensure that Canada fully upholds its obligations to women under CEDAW.

FEDERAL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

The Liberal Women's Caucus supports a broad and integrated approach to poverty reduction, based on principles of social inclusion and partnerships. They believe it is time to stop treating the symptoms of poverty with uncoordinated piecemeal programs. They commend the provinces of Newfoundland and Quebec for taking the initiative to develop comprehensive anti-poverty action strategies that address root causes.

Poverty is more than not having enough money to support a decent standard of living. It has many dimensions, including lack of access to education, employment skills and language training for immigrant women, mental and other health services, affordable housing and child care. Poverty is inextricably linked to women's vulnerability to violence and their ability to leave abusive relationships. As a result:

The Liberal Women's Caucus has been and continues to be a strong supporter of the national gun registry.

These and other barriers are exacerbated by factors such as race, class, ethnicity, language, geography (urban versus rural) and citizenship status.

The reality of "time poverty" is also becoming apparent. Women's unpaid work in either raising children or caring for others often makes them more vulnerable to poverty because they do not have time available for income-earning activities and therefore pensionable earnings. All of these barriers must be factored in when looking for long-term solutions.

Meaningful involvement by the federal government is essential if poverty-reduction strategies are to be successful. Some of the areas where the federal government would work in partnership with the provinces could include: fundamental reform of seniors' benefits (including Employment Insurance, earnings supplementation and employment programs); income tax issues; re-establishing a federal minimum wage at \$10 per hour, quality of life issues for Aboriginals; improved programs and services for persons with disabilities; access to justice including increased funding for civil legal aid and a reinstated Court Challenges Program; improved social assistance rates; more affordable housing; improved access to literacy programs; and early learning and child care. (*Reducing Poverty: An Action Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador, June 2006*) All the issues listed above are especially important to Aboriginal, immigrant and refugee women.

As one of its first priorities, the Liberal Women's Caucus encourages a new Liberal government to work collaboratively with the provinces and territories to establish a federal poverty-reduction strategy.



EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

The Liberal Early Learning and Child Care plan must continue to be a centrepiece of any Liberal election platform. The Conservative government's current approach will not build an affordable, accessible and high quality system of early learning and child care. The payment of \$100 per month is not sufficient to make a real difference to parents who have to pay on average \$783 per month for child care. It is, at best, a badly-designed income supplement. The Conservatives' \$10,000 tax credit to create new spaces is a mere fraction of what it can cost for new spaces and would be used only to set up – but not operate on a continuing basis – child care facilities. In a large urban centre like Vancouver, the estimated cost can be as much as \$40,000 per space.



The Conservative government's plan discriminates against low-income families. According to the Caledon Institute, the plan will "help modest-income families least and favour one-earner couples over single parents and two-earner couple" and does not help create an environment for early learning. A Liberal approach is to help all families.

The Liberal Women's Caucus proposes that a new Liberal government should:

- Honour the bilateral agreements signed with provinces and territories to provide a system of early learning and child care across the country. These agreements should be protected by legislation. The original Liberal commitment was for \$1 billion a year for five years – this level of support must be reinstated as a minimum starting point.
- As a longer-term goal, establish a schedule for federal funding of child care so it reaches one per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as recommended by the OECD report, *Starting Strong II*.
- Re-invest the \$1,200 per year, per family, provided under the Conservative government's policy in the Canadian Child Tax Benefit (CCTB). The Canadian Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) is already in place and works efficiently and effectively. By increasing the base benefit by \$1,200, the overwhelming majority of Canadian families would receive – and keep – a \$1,200 increase in their Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB).
- Direct the value of the Spousal Credit – the tax deduction for a spouse at home – to be paid directly to the spouse, who, in most instances, will be a woman.

Families don't have to apply for The Canada Child Tax Benefit since it is directly available through income tax. Not only poor families, but virtually all families would see a welcome improvement in their child benefits from this measure. And because the Canada Child Tax Benefit is non-taxable, families would not have to repay part of the \$1,200 to the federal and provincial/territorial governments. This is unlike the new Universal Child Care Benefit under the Conservative government, which is a taxable benefit.

INCOME SECURITY REFORMS

Pay Equity

The struggle for pay equity goes back to a recommendation by the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1970 for legislative change to address the issue of equal pay for work of equal value.

While there has been progress in the area of pay equity, Statistics Canada reports that “the gap between the earnings of women and men has not changed substantially in the past decade... In 2003, women working full-time, full-year had average earnings of \$36,500 or 71 per cent what men employed full-time, full-year made that year.” (Women in Canada 2006, 5th edition, Statistics Canada) This same report points out that women, regardless of their educational achievements, continue to have earnings well below those of their male counterparts.

The social consequences of pay inequity are profound for women and their families. Women’s lower pay cheques increase the risk of poverty for their children and have a negative impact on their retirement income. For instance, in 2004, 47.1 per cent of single-parent families were poor and over one-third of single women over the age of 65 lived in poverty.



The Conservative minority government refuses to provide leadership on this issue, ignoring both the report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women and the recommendation of the 2004 federal Task Force Report on Pay Equity that calls for replacing the current complaint-based model of pay equity with new stand-alone, pro-active legislation. This should not be a surprise. In 1998, the current Prime Minister made it clear that he thought pay equity was “a rip-off” for the taxpayers and that the federal government should “scrap its ridiculous pay equity law.” (Stephen Harper, *National Citizens Overview, Fall 1998*)

In response to a 2005 recommendation by the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, the former Liberal government committed to developing new proactive pay equity legislation for introduction in the House of Commons.

The Liberal Women’s Caucus proposes that a new Liberal government should:

- Implement pro-active pay equity legislation as recommended by the 2004 federal Pay Equity Task Force.

Senior Women

According to Statistics Canada, one of the great success stories in recent decades has been the reduction in the number of low-income senior women. In 2003, just 9 per cent of women aged 65 and over lived in an after-tax, low-income situation, compared with 27 per cent in the early 1980s. (*Women in Canada 2005, Statistics Canada*)

Still, there is room for further improvement. In the not-so-distant future, a comprehensive review of the pension system and its impact on women’s retirement income is needed.

In the meantime, the following policy suggestions will help both senior men and women, but proportionally more women, because women aged 65 and over constitute one of the fastest-growing segments of the female population in Canada. In 2004, there were an estimated 2.3 million senior women, up 26 per cent from 1991 and 72 per cent from 1981. (*Women in Canada 2005, Statistics Canada*)

The National Advisory Council on Aging provides this example: Frank lives in Ontario and receives the GIS. To make a little extra money he worked on the 2001 Census earning \$1,384. As a result he had to pay \$542 in income tax; his OAS and GIS benefits went down by \$601, and his social housing costs went up by \$216. The end result is that Frank’s extra income of \$1,384 cost him \$1,359, for a net benefit of \$25.

– *Aging in Poverty in Canada, 2005*

For example, in 2001, Isabel, age 90, discovered that she has been entitled to the CPP survivor benefit for the past 15 years but did not know it. Her husband, died at the age of 83 without even drawing a pension. Her late application means that she is entitled to retroactive benefits for only 11 months, even though her husband contributed to the Plan while he was working and the money was his due, and hers.

– *Aging in Poverty in Canada, 2005*

The Liberal Women’s Caucus proposes that a new Liberal government should:

- Allow seniors to earn income, including RRSP withdrawals, equal to as much as 10 per cent of the benefits they receive under Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) before they see their GIS reduced. Ten per cent of these two benefits would be approximately \$1,400.
- Eliminate the application form for the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS). All this information is on income-tax returns.
- Divide the GIS cheque in proportion to a couple’s income. For example, if a man earns 80 per cent of the income he would get 20 per cent of the GIS and the woman would get 80 per cent.
- Work with provinces to remove the 11-month retroactivity restriction that currently applies to CPP benefits. This change would mean that an individual applying late for CPP benefits would not be penalized.

Caregivers

Canada is fast approaching a caregiving crunch. Women, the traditional caregivers, are increasingly in the workforce and fewer families have extended family members nearby. Many caregivers face the challenge of trying to balance work, other family responsibilities, and their own needs with caregiving responsibilities.

In 1999, it was estimated that it would take 276,509 full-time employees, at a cost of \$5 to \$6 billion, to replace the unpaid caregiving services provided to seniors alone. It is further estimated that up to 3 million unpaid caregivers provide more than 80 per cent of all the care needed by people with long-term health problems. The stress and fatigue can force caregivers to reduce work hours, or leave employment altogether. These caregivers face immediate and long-term economic and social repercussions.

The Liberal Women’s Caucus proposes that a new Liberal government should:

- As a short-term measure, invest \$1 billion over five years towards the development of a national caregiving agenda. This would be done working co-operatively with the provinces and territories, especially Québec. A national conference in the fall of 2004 provided substantial information on how to develop caregiver policy.
- As a longer-term measure, extend the Canada Pension Plan drop-out provision to unpaid caregivers. This measure will address the future economic security of those who drop out of the labour force to provide care. The Liberal Women’s Caucus recognizes that this strategy would require negotiation with provincial and territorial governments as part of a review of the Canada Pension Plan (CPP).



EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE: EXPANDING MATERNITY AND PARENTAL BENEFITS

Expanding these benefits and encompassing the self-employed will benefit a greater number of women and their families.



In 2001, the Liberal government extended maternity/parental benefits under the Employment Insurance program to one year. This was an enormously popular policy change with Canadian families. However, the program has shortcomings and doesn't meet the needs of all families. According to the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL), one in every three mothers does not have access to the maternity and parental benefit program under Employment Insurance (EI) and for those who do have access, benefits are often inadequate.

In 2004-05, average weekly maternity benefits were \$312, and parental benefits averaged \$372 for men and \$316 for women. The current program excludes the self-employed and the large number of parents (such as recent immigrants, new entrants to the labour force and many part-time workers) who do not meet EI's stringent work requirements.

With more and more mothers with school-age children in the work force, it is good public policy to support this valuable contribution to society by reducing the economic impact of having children. Statistics Canada reports that in 2004, 65 per cent of all women with children under age 3 were employed, more than double the figure in 1976 when just 28 per cent were employed (*Women in Canada 2005, Statistics Canada, 2006*).

The province of Quebec is a leader in meeting the needs of women and families. In January 2006, the Québec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) came into force, replacing the maternity benefits, parental benefits, and adoption benefits previously available to new Québec parents under the federal employment insurance plan.

It has been a goal of the Liberal Women's Caucus to find a way to provide better maternity and parental benefits to all families in Canada. The extension of benefits under EI in 2001 was a great step forward but more needs to be done to build a stable, adequate system of support for families, including those that are self-employed.

The Liberal Women's Caucus proposes that a new Liberal government should:

Using the Québec model, open discussions with all provinces and territories to discuss ways to construct an improved income replacement program for parents, including self-employed individuals.

The Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) plan is an attractive model to emulate. Some components of the plan include:

- A choice between two options: the basic plan or the special plan. Each plan differs with regards to the duration of leave and income replacement rate. For instance; a person can decide to receive a lesser benefit amount for a longer period or a higher amount for a shorter period.
- Benefits are payable as of the eligibility date.
- Salaried workers and self-employed workers alike are eligible.
- Farmers with a salaried job on or outside the farm who hold shares in the farming business are eligible.
- The minimum insurable income taken into account for benefit calculation purposes is \$2,000, regardless of the number of hours worked.
- Paternity benefits are available exclusively for the father of the newborn.

CONCLUSION

The National Liberal Women's Caucus has been and will continue to be at the forefront of the struggle for greater social and economic equality for women.

Whether fighting for the survival of programs and recognition of women under the current Conservative government, or ensuring that women see their societal realities reflected in future Liberal government policies and programs, members of the Liberal Women's Caucus give voice and action to the aspirations and hopes of all Canadian women.

65 per cent of all women with children under age 3 in 2004 were employed, more than double the figure in 1976 when just 28 per cent were employed

(Women in Canada 2005, Statistics Canada, 2006).

It was in this spirit that the Liberal Women's Caucus members began their deliberations in July, 2006, with the aim of developing policies to improve the lives of women and families. These and subsequent discussions are reflected in *The Pink Book: A Policy Framework for Canada's Future, Volume 1*, and are a first step in a process to ensure that the voices and hopes of women are reflected in the policies of the Liberal Party of Canada and become the policies of Canada's government.

The specific recommendations lay a foundation for the development of social and economic equality for women.

As progress is made on the immediate issues raised by the Liberal Women's Caucus, attention will focus on the next set of improvements that need to become government policy.



As an ongoing commitment, the Liberal Women's Caucus will be listening and meeting the women of Canada and, as a guide to future policy, will be asking for their experience and insight into the modern realities facing women and families.

This commitment to action and to being a strong voice for women is our pledge to Canada's women and families that their future will be based on shared economic opportunities and equality.



We look forward to the feedback and ideas from concerned citizens across Canada. We can be reached via the Liberal Women's Caucus directory included in this book or via email at info@pinkbook.ca.

National Liberal Women's Caucus Directory

National Liberal Women's Caucus Executive



Hon. Belinda Stronach, P.C.
Chair / Présidente
Newmarket–Aurora
480 Confederation Building
Tel: (613) 992-9310
Fax: (613) 992-9407

Weston Produce Plaza
16715 Yonge Street, Unit 1
Newmarket, Ontario L3X 1X4
Tel: (905) 836-7722
Fax: (905) 836-4911



L'hon. Diane Marleau, C.P.
Vice-présidente / Vice Chair
Sudbury
533, Édifice de la
Confédération
Tel: (613) 996-8962
Fax: (613) 995-2569

36, rue Elgin
Sudbury (Ontario) P3C 5B4
Tel: (705) 673-7107
Fax: (705) 673-0944



Ms. Susan Kadis
Treasurer / Trésorière
Thornhill
578 Confederation Building
Tel: (613) 992-0253
Fax: (613) 992-0887

7670 Yonge Street, Unit 10
Thornhill, Ontario L4J 1W1
Tel: (613) 886-9911
Fax: (613) 886-5267



Members of Parliament



Hon. Sue Barnes, P.C.
London West
237 West Block
Tel: (613) 996-6674
Fax: (613) 996-6772

460-A Springbank Drive
London, Ontario N6J 1G8
Tel: (519) 473-5955
Fax: (519) 473-7333



Ms. Colleen Beaumier
Brampton West
911 Justice Building
Tel: (613) 995-5381
Fax: (613) 995-6796

13 Fisherman Drive, Unit 16
Brampton, Ontario L7A 2X9
Tel: (905) 846-0076
Fax: (905) 846-3901



Hon. Carolyn Bennett, P.C.
St. Paul's
804 Justice Building
Tel: (613) 995-9666
Fax: (613) 947-4622

1650 Yonge Street, Suite 103
Toronto, Ontario M4T 2A2
Tel: (416) 952-3990
Fax: (416) 952-3995



Ms. Bonnie Brown
Oakville
147 Confederation Building
Tel: (613) 995-4014
Fax: (613) 992-0520

2421 Marine Drive, Unit 3
Oakville, Ontario L6L 1C6
Tel: (905) 827-2077
Fax: (905) 827-7516



Hon. Brenda Chamberlain, P.C.
Guelph
450 Confederation Building
Tel: (613) 996-4758
Fax: (613) 996-9922

40 Cork Street East
Guelph, Ontario N1H 2W8
Tel: (519) 837-8276
Fax: (519) 837-8443



Ms. Ruby Dhalla
Brampton-Springdale
218 West Block
Tel: (613) 995-4843
Fax: (613) 995-7003

284 Queen Street East, Suite 215
Brampton, Ontario L6V 1C2
Tel: (905) 874-6868
Fax: (905) 874-1415



Madame Raymonde Folco
Laval-Les Iles
809, édifice de la Justice
Tel: (613) 992-2659
Fax: (613) 992-9469

674, de la Place Publique, Bureau 205
Laval (Québec) H7X 1G1
Tel: (450) 689-4594
Fax: (450) 689-5092



Hon. Hedy Fry, P.C.
Vancouver Centre
583 Confederation Building
Tel: (613) 992-3213
Fax: (613) 995-0056

1030 Denman Street, Suite 106
Vancouver, British Columbia
V6G 2M6
Tel: (604) 666-0135
Fax: (604) 666-0114



Hon. Albina Guarnieri, P.C.
Mississauga East–Cooksville
 434 Confederation Building
 Tel: (613) 996-0420
 Fax: (613) 996-0279

33 City Centre Drive, Suite 364
 Mississauga, Ontario L5B 2N5
 Tel: (905) 566-0009
 Fax: (905) 566-0017



**Ms. Tina Keeper
 Churchill**
 710 Confederation Building
 Tel: (613) 992-3018
 Fax: (613) 996-5817

201-3 Station Road, Box 6
 Thompson, Manitoba R8N 0N3
 Tel: (204) 677-1333
 Fax: (204) 677-1339



L'hon. Marlene Jennings, C.P.
Notre-Dame-de-Grâce–Lachine
 416, édifice de l'Ouest
 Tel: (613) 995-2251
 Fax: (613) 996-1481

6332, rue Sherbrooke Ouest, Bureau 204
 Montréal (Québec) H4B 1M7
 Tel: (514) 489-8703
 Fax: (514) 489-2806



L'hon. Diane Marleau, C.P.
Sudbury
 533, Édifice de la Confédération
 Tel: (613) 996-8962
 Fax: (613) 995-2569

36, rue Elgin
 Sudbury (Ontario) P3C 5B4
 Tel: (705) 673-7107
 Fax: (705) 673-0944



**Ms. Susan Kadis
 Thornhill**
 578 Confederation Building
 Tel: (613) 992-0253
 Fax: (613) 992-0887

7670 Yonge Street, Unit 10
 Thornhill, Ontario L4J 1W1
 Tel: (905) 886-9911
 Fax: (905) 886-5267



Hon. Maria Minna, P.C.
Beaches–East York
 406 West Block
 Tel: (613) 992-2115
 Fax: (613) 996-7942

1912 Danforth Avenue
 Toronto, Ontario M4C 1J4
 Tel: (416) 467-0860
 Fax: (416) 467-0905



**Mrs. Nancy Karetak-Lindell
 Nunavut**
 910 Justice Building
 Tel: (613) 992-2848
 Fax: (613) 996-9764

P.O. Box 344
 Arviat, Nunavut X0C 0E0
 Tel: (867) 857-2888
 Fax: (867) 857-2229



Hon. Anita Neville, P.C.
Winnipeg South Centre
 815 Confederation Building
 Tel: (613) 992-9475
 Fax: (613) 992-9586

729 Corydon Avenue, Unit D
 Winnipeg, Manitoba R3M 0W4
 Tel: (204) 983-1355
 Fax: (204) 984-3979



Ms. Yasmin Ratansi
Don Valley East
784 Confederation Building
Tel: (613) 995-4988
Fax: (613) 995-1686

220 Duncan Mills Road,
Suite 211
Toronto, Ontario M3B 3J5
Tel: (416) 443-0623
Fax: (416) 443-9819



Hon. Karen Redman, P.C.
Kitchener Centre
264 West Block
Tel: (613) 995-8913
Fax: (613) 996-7329

105 King Street East, Suite 2
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 2K8
Tel: (519) 741-2001
Fax: (519) 579-2404



L'hon. Lucienne Robillard, C.P.
Westmount-Ville-Marie
435-S, édifice du Centre
Tel: (613) 996-7267
Fax: (613) 995-8632

4060, rue Ste Catherine Ouest,
Bureau 340
Montréal (Québec) H3Z 2Z3
Tel: (514) 283-2013
Fax: (514) 283-9790



Hon. Judy Sgro, P.C.
York West
204 Justice Building
Tel: (613) 992-7774
Fax: (613) 947-8319

2201 Finch Avenue West,
Suite 25
North York, Ontario M9M 2Y9
Tel: (416) 744-1882
Fax: (416) 952-1696



Hon. Belinda Stronach, P.C.
Newmarket-Aurora
480 Confederation Building
Tel: (613) 992-9310
Fax: (613) 992-9407

Weston Produce Plaza
16715 Yonge Street, Unit 1
Newmarket, Ontario L3X 1X4
Tel: (905) 836-7722
Fax: (905) 836-4911

Senators



L'hon. Lise Bacon
Québec
269-E, édifice du Centre
Le Sénat du Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0A4
Tel: (613) 995-6194
Fax: (613) 992-7380



Hon. Joan Cook
Newfoundland and Labrador
253 East Block
The Senate of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A4
Tel: (613) 943-1051
Fax: (613) 943-1053



Hon. Catherine S. Callbeck
Prince Edward Island
354 East Block
The Senate of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A4
Tel: (613) 943-0686
Fax: (613) 943-0693



Hon. Jane Cordy
Nova Scotia
503 Victoria Building
The Senate of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A4
Tel: (613) 995-8409
Fax: (613) 995-8432



Hon. Sharon Carstairs, P.C.
Manitoba
236 East Block
The Senate of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A4
Tel: (613) 947-7123
Fax: (613) 947-7125



Hon. Joyce Fairbairn, P.C.
Alberta
571-S Centre Block
The Senate of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A4
Tel: (613) 996-4382
Fax: (613) 995-3223



L'hon. Maria Chaput
Manitoba
806, édifice Victoria
Le Sénat du Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0A4
Tel: (613) 943-2435
Fax: (613) 943-2482



Hon. Joan Fraser
Quebec
379-S Centre Block
The Senate of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A4
Tel: (613) 943-9556
Fax: (613) 943-9558



Hon. Ione Christensen, C.M.
Yukon Territory
550-N Centre Block
The Senate of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A4
Tel: (613) 996-5937
Fax: (613) 996-5954



L'hon. Céline Hervieux-Payette, C.P.
Québec
361-E, édifice du Centre
Le Sénat du Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0A4
Tel: (613) 947-8008
Fax: (613) 947-8010



Hon. Elizabeth Hubley
Prince Edward Island
 351 East Block
 The Senate of Canada
 Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A4
 Tel: (613) 992-1177
 Fax: (613) 992-1560



Hon. Mobina S.B. Jaffer, Q.C.
British Columbia
 900 Victoria Building
 The Senate of Canada
 Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A4
 Tel: (613) 992-0189
 Fax: (613) 992-0673



Hon. Rose-Marie Losier-Cool
New Brunswick
 589-S Centre Block
 The Senate of Canada
 Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A4
 Tel: (613) 947-8011
 Fax: (613) 947-8013



Sandra M. Lovelace Nicholas
New Brunswick
 587-S Centre Block
 The Senate of Canada
 Ottawa, Ontario K1A
 Tel: (613) 943-3635
 Fax: (613) 943-3637



Hon. Pana Merchant
Saskatchewan
 418 Victoria Building
 The Senate of Canada
 Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A4
 Tel: (613) 944-7777
 Fax: (613) 944-7778



Hon. Lorna Milne
Ontario
 247 East Block
 The Senate of Canada
 Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A4
 Tel: (613) 947-7695
 Fax: (613) 947-9589



L'hon. Lucie Pépin
Québec
 215, édifice de l'Est
 Le Sénat du Canada
 Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0A4
 Tel: (613) 996-1726
 Fax: (613) 996-8392



L'hon. Marie-P. Poulin
Ontario
 250-N, édifice du Centre
 Le Sénat du Canada
 Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0A4
 Tel: (613) 947-8005
 Fax: (613) 947-8007



Hon. Vivienne Poy
Ontario
 205 Victoria Building
 The Senate of Canada
 Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A4
 Tel: (613) 943-7854
 Fax: (613) 943-7856



L'hon. Pierrette Ringuette

Nouveau-Brunswick
104, édifice Victoria
Le Sénat du Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0A4
Tel: (613) 943-2248
Fax: (613) 943-2245



Claudette Tardif

Alberta
314 Victoria Building
The Senate of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A4
Tel: (613) 947-3589
Fax: (613) 947-3609



Email: info@pinkbook.ca
Courriel: info@livrerose.ca
www.liberal.ca