

## **BPW Canada Federal Election Package 2011**

### **Suggested Activities for BPW clubs**

1. Hold an all-candidates meeting, on your own or partner with other like-minded organizations such as CFUW. Limit the time the candidates speak, and give participants maximum opportunity to ask questions and raise issues. Provide a list of BPW questions in advance to the candidates so they can be prepared to include their response in their opening statements and/or to provide an informed answer.
2. Attend candidates meetings as a group, and raise BPW issues. Try to get seven members to take each of the questions below.
3. Copy the list of issues/questions (and some of the background), attach a cover letter from your club, and deliver it to each of the candidates in your riding(s).
4. Write letters to the editors of local newspapers to raise BPW issues.
5. Have club members call phone-in shows on radio and TV, and ask BPW questions.

### **Index of Issues:**

1. Status of Women Canada cuts
2. Early learning & childcare
3. Political reform
4. Employment Insurance
5. Poverty
6. Pay Equity
7. Human Trafficking

<b>Issue #1: Status of Women Canada (SWC) Cuts</b>	
<b>Background</b>	<p>-Major cuts made by the Tory government to SWC (\$5 million) in 2006. The money was reinstated six months later, but not to the program budget.</p> <p>-Closing of SWC offices (12 of 16).</p> <p>-SWC would no longer fund research or advocacy/lobbying work.</p> <p>-Note that since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women reported in 1970, women's groups, especially BPW, lobbied for SWC, realizing the need for this organization.</p> <p>-See <i>Equality for Women: Beyond the Illusion</i> report, December 2005, full report can be downloaded at: <a href="http://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/285941/publication.html">http://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/285941/publication.html</a></p> <p>The government also abolished funding for the Court Challenges Program of Canada, a non-profit organization whose purpose was to provide financial assistance for important court cases that advance language and equality rights guaranteed under Canada's Constitution. The program was partially restored in June 2008 for the official languages component of the program, under the name "Language Rights Support Program." For background see <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Court_Challenges_Program_of_Canada">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Court_Challenges_Program_of_Canada</a></p>
<b>Key Points</b>	<p>-Women need access to government services at the local level – cutting offices reduces access and sustains problems women experience.</p> <p>-Advocacy and lobbying government to change barriers inherent in our social system and structures are very necessary if real equality is to be achieved in Canada. Many equality-seeking groups lost funding and/or have closed their doors since these changes were made (e.g., National Association of Women and the Law, Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada)</p>
<b>Questions</b>	<p>-Do you agree that Status of Women Canada should fund equality-seeking groups that do advocacy and lobbying? that do research on women's issues?</p> <p>-What are the benchmarks you propose to see true equality in Canada?</p> <p>-Is your party committed to reinstating the Court Challenges Program?</p>

<b>Issue #2: Early learning &amp; childcare</b>	
<b>Background</b>	-Before the current government was elected in 2006, the Liberal government was rolling out a national childcare program. It had signed contracts with most of the provinces, and childcare spaces were being created. Once elected, the current government scrapped those contracts, and implemented a program to give \$100/month per child under six (taxable) directly to parents. There is no requirement to spend the money on childcare. As a result, there are childcare spaces available for a very small percentage of children who need it.
<b>Key Points</b>	<p>-Women must have access to services to be full and equal members of society.</p> <p>-If Canada wants to be a leading knowledge-based society, it must provide the support for all its citizens to achieve at the highest level. Women cannot do this under the double burden. Our children today are our leaders of tomorrow. Why aren't we giving them the best start possible?</p> <p>- BPW Canada supports both public and private delivery of this service, based on the "QUAD" principle: quality, universally inclusive, accessible and childcare with a developmental focus.</p> <p>-Human Resources Minister Diane Finley told Parliament recently: "It's the Liberals who wanted to ensure that parents are forced to have other people raise their children. We do not believe in that."</p>
<b>Questions</b>	<p>-Does your party support a national early learning and childcare program based on the QUADs principle?</p> <p>-Will your party actively work for a national early learning and childcare program?</p> <p>-Will you work collaboratively women's and interest groups to ensure the best program for the nation's children is adopted?</p>

<b>Issue #3: Political Reform</b>																																																																						
<b>Background</b>	<p>-With just 69 women in Parliament (22.4% of MPs), Canada now ranks 49<sup>th</sup> in the world on Inter-Parliamentary Union's "List of Women in National Parliaments," with fewer women in Parliament than most of Europe, parts of Africa and many other countries around the world.</p> <p>-Women represent 52% of Canada's population, and make up an average of 21% of Canada's municipal councils, provincial legislatures and the House of Commons.</p>																																																																					
<b>Key Points</b>	<p>-Obviously something is wrong with the system, since the number of women elected to the House of Commons has been around the 20% mark since 1993.</p> <p>-Polling data consistently shows that women care about different issues.</p> <p>-The United Nations says that a critical mass of at least 30% women is needed before legislatures produce public policy representing women's concerns and before political institutions begin to change the way they do business.</p> <p>-The voluntary approach used in Canada in the past decade to encourage political parties to nominate more women has not have any significant impact.</p> <p>-Research shows that when more women candidates run for office, more women are elected to office. The bottleneck is getting women nominated, particularly in winnable seats.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Women Candidates Nominated and Elected by Political Parties – 2008 Election</b></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th rowspan="2">Political Party</th> <th colspan="2">Total Candidates</th> <th colspan="2">Male Candidates</th> <th colspan="2">Female Candidates</th> <th colspan="2">% Female Candidates</th> </tr> <tr> <th>Nominated</th> <th>Elected</th> <th>Nominated</th> <th>Elected</th> <th>Nominated</th> <th>Elected</th> <th>Nominated</th> <th>Elected</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Bloc Québécois</td> <td>75</td> <td>49</td> <td>55</td> <td>34</td> <td>20</td> <td>15</td> <td>28%</td> <td>30.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Conservatives</td> <td>307</td> <td>143</td> <td>244</td> <td>120</td> <td>63</td> <td>23</td> <td>20%</td> <td>16.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Liberals</td> <td>307</td> <td>77</td> <td>194</td> <td>58</td> <td>113</td> <td>19</td> <td>37%</td> <td>24.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>NDP</td> <td>308</td> <td>37</td> <td>204</td> <td>25</td> <td>104</td> <td>12</td> <td>34%</td> <td>32.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Green Party</td> <td>303</td> <td>0</td> <td>213</td> <td>0</td> <td>90</td> <td>0</td> <td>29.7%</td> <td>0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Source: <a href="http://www.equalvoice.ca/facts.cfm">www.equalvoice.ca/facts.cfm</a></p>								Political Party	Total Candidates		Male Candidates		Female Candidates		% Female Candidates		Nominated	Elected	Nominated	Elected	Nominated	Elected	Nominated	Elected	Bloc Québécois	75	49	55	34	20	15	28%	30.6%	Conservatives	307	143	244	120	63	23	20%	16.1%	Liberals	307	77	194	58	113	19	37%	24.7%	NDP	308	37	204	25	104	12	34%	32.4%	Green Party	303	0	213	0	90	0	29.7%	0
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<b>Questions</b>	<p>-What will your party do to ensure that women are better represented?</p> <p>-What does your party propose to change the culture of politics to be more women/family friendly, to ensure more decorum in the House of Commons and Senate?</p> <p>-Use statistics from table (above) to ask about their particular party. i.e. in 2008, the Conservatives nominated the least number of women, had the least number elected. How will they change this?</p>																																																																					

<b>Issue #4: Employment Insurance</b>	
<b>Background</b>	<p>-Women are less likely than men to qualify for EI benefits because they tend to move in and out of the labour market to handle care-giving responsibilities; they are more likely than men to work in part-time and/or low-paying jobs.</p> <p>-Applicants need between 420 and 700 hours to qualify for EI (depending on where they live in Canada) or 910 hours if they are deemed to be a new or re-entrant. Women are often not able to work enough hours to qualify.</p> <p>-Women are more likely than men to quit a job when family responsibilities conflict with job schedules; anyone quitting a job “without just cause” cannot collect EI.</p> <p>-In January 2010, the government changed the legislation to allow self-employed people to collect special benefits (i.e., sickness, maternity/parental) but there has been little take-up of this because of financial implications.</p> <p>-There has also been little take-up of Compassionate Care Benefits. A BPW Canada resolution (2010) called on the government to extend benefits for this program to 15 weeks (currently eight) and to also include caregivers of family members who are in need of care due to a serious condition or illness whether or not they are expected to recover. (See brief on website)</p> <p>-A BPW resolution (2004) called for: 360 hours to qualify, longer benefit period, benefits up to 18 months for individuals over 35 years of age, a weekly benefit based on no longer than 2/3 of the best 12 weeks of earnings, and regular EI benefits for all hours of work lost while in training.</p> <p>See Monica Townson and Kevin Hayes. <i>Women and the Employment Insurance Program: The Gender Impact of Current Rules on Eligibility and Earnings Replacement</i>, 2007. <a href="http://www.policyalternatives.ca/authors/monica-townson">www.policyalternatives.ca/authors/monica-townson</a></p>
<b>Key Points</b>	<p>-Inequity: Women are denied access because they are more likely (not necessarily by choice) to be in part-time or contract or self-employed jobs that do not qualify for EI.</p> <p>-Canada’s EI program is a powerful reminder of what happens when policies do not consider the different needs of women and men.</p> <p>-More than ever, in an economic downturn, we need progressive legislation that protects those most vulnerable.</p> <p>-The program for self-employed needs to be re-designed to make it more financial feasibility.</p>
<b>Questions</b>	<p>-What will your party do to redress gender inequalities in EI programs?</p>

<b>Issue #5: Poverty in Canada</b>	
<b>Background</b>	<p>-Poverty is a significant issue in Canada. According to Statistics Canada, just over three million Canadians lived in a low-income situation in 2008, virtually unchanged from 2007, using the after-tax low income cut-offs. This represents 9.4% of the population. <a href="http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/100617/dq100617c-eng.htm">www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/100617/dq100617c-eng.htm</a></p> <p>-The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAOW) notes that poverty is very much a women's issue:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 51.6% of lone parent families headed by women are poor;</li> <li>• Almost half (41.5%) of single, widowed or divorced ("unattached") women over 65 are poor;</li> <li>• 35% of women on their own under 65 live in poverty;</li> <li>• Many women with disabilities, Aboriginal women, visible minority and immigrant women also live in poverty.</li> </ul> <p><a href="http://www.fafia-afai.org/en/story/women-and-poverty-criaw-fact-sheet">www.fafia-afai.org/en/story/women-and-poverty-criaw-fact-sheet</a></p> <p>READ BPW Canada Position Statement: <i>Incomes for Senior Women</i> (BPW 2005) Available on website</p>
<b>Key Points</b>	<p>-Some provinces have addressed this issue by developing provincial poverty reduction strategies but to date, the federal government has not addressed this issue in a comprehensive way.</p> <p>-BPW Canada has called on the Government of Canada to develop a National Poverty Reduction Strategy to alleviate poverty, establishing clear targets, timelines, budgets and a measurable program evaluation process (see BPW Canada 2009 brief).</p>
<b>Questions</b>	<p>-How concerned are you that so many women (so many groups of women) live in poverty in Canada?</p> <p>-What is your party's position/plan to end poverty in Canada? Please be specific. What are the key elements that would be important to include in a poverty reduction strategy?</p> <p>-Will your party commit to a serious review and reform of national pension programs?</p> <p>-If you were elected, what is the first thing you would do to end poverty in Canada?</p>

<b>Issue #6: Pay Equity</b>	
<b>Background</b>	<p>-Women in Canada continue to earn, on average, 20% less than men (full-time workers). One reason for this significant wage gap is the lack of pay equity in Canada.</p> <p>-Pay equity refers to equal pay for work of equal value. Some provinces have implemented pay equity, at least in their public service.</p> <p>-In 2004, a national Pay Equity Task Force recommended stand-alone pro-active pay equity legislation that put the onus on employers to ensure pay equity. The existing system was a “complaints-based” system that was deemed very slow and ineffective. The Task Force report called pay equity a “fundamental human right.”</p> <p>-BPW Canada supported this report.</p> <p>-The Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act 2009, which was included in the federal budget, transformed pay equity into an “equitable compensation issue” that must be discussed at the bargaining table. If pay equity is not achieved during the bargaining process, workers can file individual complaints with the Public Service Staff Relations Board but without the help of their union (which can be fined \$50,000 for helping).</p>
<b>Key Points</b>	-BPW Canada continues to support the recommendation in the 2004 Task Force Report for stand-alone pro-active pay equity legislation that makes employers responsible for implementing pay equity.
<b>Questions</b>	<p>-Does your party support the need for pay equity in both public and private sectors?</p> <p>-If not, why not? If so, what are you committed to do about pay equity, if elected?</p>

<b>Issue #7: Human Trafficking</b>	
<b>Background</b>	<p>-Human trafficking in Canada and world-wide is a serious, despicable crime. (Read Victor Malarek's book, <i>The Natashas</i>, for an unbelievable look at how this industry destroys lives.)</p> <p>-The Criminal Intelligence Service of Canada states that Canadian women and under-aged girls are exploited sexually and transported both within Canada and into the US for sexual exploitation.</p> <p>-According to the RCMP, 800 to 1200 people are trafficked in and through Canada each year.</p> <p>-In 2005, Bill C-49 was passed to amend the Criminal Code to specifically prohibit trafficking in persons in Canada, but very few prosecutions have been carried out.</p> <p>-BPW Canada has passed several resolutions on this issue (all briefs available on website):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2006, to strengthen resources available for prosecution;</li> <li>• 2008, to encourage the government of Canada to work with the UN to eliminate sex tourism;</li> <li>• 2008, to encourage the government of Canada to work with BC to counter human trafficking at 2010 Olympics;</li> <li>• 2010, to encourage the government of Canada to develop an integrated National Action Plan to stop human trafficking.</li> </ul>
<b>Key Points</b>	<p>-Even though we have laws against sexual assault and kidnapping in Canada, human traffickers continue to operate in Canada.</p> <p>-Very few prosecutions have been carried out under Bill C-49.</p> <p>-The federal government does not have an integrated action plan to stop this exploitation, which is mainly of women and girls.</p>
<b>Questions</b>	<p>-How important/urgent is this issue, in your view?</p> <p>-Do you support the need for an integration action plan in Canada to put an end to human trafficking?</p> <p>-What should the key elements of such a plan be, in your view?</p>