



**Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada**

**Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada**

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Position Paper # 50

Abortion and the Conservative Party (Tories)

The Conservative Party of Canada was formed in 2003, through the merger of the Canadian Alliance (previously the Reform Party) and the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada. The merger was ratified by the membership of the Alliance on December 5, 2003 (by a margin of 96% to 4%), and by delegates of the PC Party on December 6, 2003 (by a margin of 90% to 10%). On December 8, 2003, the new party was officially registered with Elections Canada and on March 20, 2004, Stephen Harper was elected leader of the new party.

The 2003 merger, a tangible outcome of the Canadian "Unite the Right" movement, was motivated by the goal of presenting an effective right-wing opposition to the Liberal Party of Canada, and of creating a new national party that would not split the right-wing vote. Such splitting contributed, in part, to Liberal victories in the 1997 and 2000 federal elections.

The Conservative Party has historically demonstrated its anti-choice position. In 1989, the Progressive Conservatives introduced Bill C-43 to recriminalize abortion, authorizing criminal charges against physicians who performed abortions that were not deemed medically necessary. On May 29, 1990, the House of Commons passed the bill. Before Senate approval, however, the media reported two cases of clandestine abortions. In June 1990, a teenager from Kitchener, Ontario, was injured during a botched abortion performed in a man's home. Several days later, a Toronto woman died from a self-induced, coat-hanger abortion. On January 31, 1991, Bill C-43 was defeated in by a tie vote in the Senate.

Presently, the Conservative Party of Canada has official Opposition status in a Liberal minority government. Although Conservative Party leader Stephen Harper has tried to paint a picture of a more moderate party, in truth 83% of the Conservative caucus before the 2004 election was publicly anti-choice—59 out of 71 MPs. Moreover, since the January 2006 election, one-third of MP's in Parliament can be labeled anti-choice, the majority of whom are Conservatives. (To be considered anti-choice, these MPs must have done at least one of the following: have an anti-choice voting record; have spoken publicly at or attended events organized by anti-choice groups; have publicly stated they are "pro-life"; or have stated they would support abortion only in limited circumstances.¹)

¹ A number of MPs reportedly said that regardless of their personal views on abortion, they would follow their constituents' wishes. On that basis, a few MPs from the lists have not been counted among anti-choice MPS even though they were personally anti-abortion.

Anti-Choice Federal MPs

	Before 2006 Election	After 2006 Election
Total Anti-Choice MPs	93 of 306 MPs (30%)	100 of 308 MPs (32%)
Conservative Party	72 of 98 MPs (73%)	78 of 124 MPs (63%)
Liberal Party	20 of 133 MPs (15%)	22 of 103 MPs (21%)
Other	1 Independent	—
Pro-Choice*		140 of 308 MPs (45%)
Refused to say		49 of 308 MPs (16%)
Unknown stance		19 of 308 MPs (6%)

* Includes Conservative and Liberal MPs with a public pro-choice position, and all Bloc Quebecois and NDP MP's on the *assumption* they are pro-choice. There are about **8** pro-choice Conservatives, and about **64** pro-choice Liberals.

Conservative Party of Canada – Anti-Choice MPs

Jim Abbott	Peter Goldring	Gordon O'Connor
Diane Ablonczy	Gary Goodyear	Brian Pallister
Harold Albrecht	Nina Grewal	James Rajotte
Mike Allen	Art Hanger	Pierre Poilievre
Dean Allison	Richard Harris	Scott Reid
Rob Anders	Loyola Hearn	Lee Richardson
David L. Anderson	Russ Hiebert	Gerry Ritz
Leon Benoit	Jay Hill	Andrew Scheer
Garry Breitkreuz	Brian Jean	Bev Shipley
Gordon Brown	Randy Kamp	Carol Skelton
Rod Bruinooge	Jason Kenney	Joy Smith
Colin Carrie	Ed Komarnicki	Monte Solberg
Bill Casey	Daryl Kramp	Kevin Sorenson
Rick Casson	Guy Lauzon	Chuck Strahl
John Cummins	Pierre Lemieux	David Sweet
Patricia Davidson	Tom Lukiwski	Greg Thompson
Stockwell Day	James Lunney	Myron Thompson
Dean Del Mastro	Gary Lunn	Vic Toews
Norman Doyle	Ted Menzies	Bradley Trost
Rick Dykstra	Rob Merrifield	David Van Kesteren
Ken Epp	Bob Mills	Maurice Vellacott
Brian Fitzpatrick	James Moore	Mark Warawa
Jim Flaherty	Rob Moore	Jeff Watson
Royal Galipeau	Rob Nicholson	John Williams
Cheryl Gallant	Deepak Obhrai	Lynne Yelich

Liberal Party — Anti-choice MPs

Raymond Bonin	Wajid Khan	Paul Steckle
Joe Comuzzi	Gurbax Malhi	Paul Szabo
Wayne Easter	Lawrence MacAuley	Alan Tonks
Mark Eyking	John Maloney	Joe Volpe
John Godfrey	Joe McGuire	Tom Wappel
Albina Guarneri	Dan McTeague	Borys Wrzesnewskyi
Charles Hubbard	Shawn Murphy	Paul Zed
Jim Karygiannis		

2004 Federal Election

During the 2004 federal election campaign, Conservative MP and Opposition Health Critic Rob Merrifield from Yellowhead, Alberta told the *Globe & Mail* that he supported independent counseling for women contemplating abortion because, he reasoned, “people who take part in it may only be seeing one side of it.” He determined that counseling should “lay out all of the factual information on the repercussions of a procedure, the potential for good, the potential for side effects.” In response to media coverage of the abortion issue, Harper stated: “A Conservative government led by me will not be tabling abortion legislation. It will not be sponsoring an abortion referendum.” He also claimed that his own beliefs on abortion were “somewhere in the middle.” He also said that he would not allow government-backed abortion legislation “in this term,” but refused to rule out such action in a future mandate. He admitted he would allow a free vote on abortion if an MP introduced a private member's bill: “Absolutely ... I would generally continue the practice of allowing free votes on all private members’ legislation.” He also refused to rule out using the Notwithstanding clause in the Constitution to prohibit gay marriage.

Yet, several outspoken members of the Conservative Party continued to make public statements that contradicted Harper’s official stance. Conservative MP Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, Ontario) was quoted by the *Western Catholic Reporter* as saying that the beheading of American contractor Nicholas Berg by terrorists in Iraq was “absolutely no different” than abortion. Her remarks were made at the May 13 2005, March for Life rally in Ottawa. Stephen Harper responded to the incident by stating that, “Cheryl Gallant is a very strong pro-life MP, and this is the rhetoric that the pro-life movement often uses. It’s their business. I don’t think it’s particularly effective in public opinion.” Although she made no further comments, Gallant had previously gotten in trouble for saying that the “caucus as a whole” wanted to repeal Canada’s new hate law protecting sexual orientation.

In June, Conservative MP Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon-Wanuskewin) told a group of high-school students: “We shouldn’t have abortion open-season for all nine months,” arguing for restrictions on abortion. He was quoted in the *Star Phoenix* complaining: “Right now, there isn’t any limitations on abortions.” By the end of the month, the *Vancouver Sun* revealed that during a May 19 interview with a documentary filmmaker, Abbotsford MP Randy White claimed the Conservatives would “not be shy” about invoking the Notwithstanding clause over gay marriage and abortion, arguing that the courts have “usurped the laws of the nation.” Because of the courts, he added, Canada now has “abortion on demand.” Stephen Harper excused White's comments by saying “It's very much a personal view of his.”

Due in part to public distrust of the Conservatives on social issues, on June 28 Prime Minister Paul Martin won a minority Liberal government with 135 seats. The Conservatives won 99 seats, the NDP 19, the Bloc Quebecois 54, and one Independent won a seat (Chuck Cadman of Surrey BC, formerly a Conservative; now deceased). Following the election fallout, at a March 2005 policy convention, by a narrow vote the Conservative party officially adopted the position that they would not introduce legislation on the subject of abortion. On their official website, a policy guidebook proclaims: “A Conservative Government will not support any legislation to regulate abortion.” ARCC believes that this position was adopted in an attempt to silence vocal pro-choice opposition to the traditionally anti-choice stance taken by the Conservatives, but warns of the need to remain vigilant. Ultimately, only the Conservative Party of Canada has an interest in criminalizing abortion if elected; all other political parties in Canada currently support a woman’s right to choose.

2006 Federal Election

During the 2006 federal election campaign, Stephen Harper effectively muzzled his candidates on the issues of abortion and gay marriage. He continued to state that his government if elected, would not initiate or support abortion legislation.

On January 20, 2006, Stephen Harper and his Conservatives won a minority government, with 124 seats. The Liberals won 103 seats, the NDP 29, the Bloc Quebecois 51, and one Independent won a seat.

Action Canada Population and Development (ACPD) reported a new total of 90 anti-choice MPs from all parties, 16 Liberals and 74 Conservatives. There were 5 fewer anti-choice Liberal MPs and only 4 more anti-choice Conservative MPs. 65 MPs did not state their positions, (42 Conservatives, 23 Liberals). Also, there were 3 more pro-choice Conservative MPs, for a total of 8, and a total of 64 pro-choice Liberals. ACPD says that abortion rights should be safe during this Parliament, because of the minority of potential anti-choice votes.

Sources

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