



For immediate release

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## Whipping the Conservative Party: *It's now in the anti-choice corner*

**The entire Conservative caucus in Ottawa has been designated as anti-choice by the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada.**

Until June 2023, ARCC had listed [fifteen “pro-choice” Conservative MPs](#) (out of 117 at that time) who supported abortion rights based on their past votes and assurances. But that has changed because of a rightward shift within the Conservative Party, and a unanimous Conservative vote for a private member bill widely seen as a “[trick](#)” to re-open the abortion debate.

On June 14, the Conservative caucus banded together to vote in favour of Bill C-311, which would have created an “aggravating circumstance” clause in the Criminal Code to allow for greater penalties when a pregnant person is attacked. (The bill, introduced by Conservative MP Cathay Wagantall, was defeated by a vote of 205 to 113.)

We suspect the vote was whipped, which is unprecedented for the Conservative party on a private member’s bill. Even if it was not officially whipped, it signals a concerning shift to the right in the Conservative Party under the leadership of Pierre Poilievre, who had stated that [he supported the bill](#).

### What was wrong with Bill C-311?

The Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada had urged MPs to oppose this bill. Even though the wording did not directly implicate abortion, it was being leveraged for the purpose of advancing restrictions or to boost fetal personhood.

We spelled out our reasons against the bill in our paper [Six Reasons to Oppose Bill C-311](#), which was sent to every single MP twice (March 27 and May 4). In summary:

1. The bill was redundant, as other clauses in that Criminal Code section can cover pregnant victims.
2. More effective measures are needed to address gender-based violence.
3. Only anti-abortion groups supported the bill. Reproductive rights groups and anti-violence groups were united in their opposition to the bill.

4. MP Cathay Wagantall’s motivation behind the bill was suspect – not only had she introduced previous bills that would restrict or threaten abortion rights, she used this new bill to advocate for fetal rights and an abortion law.
5. If passed, the anti-choice movement was openly planning to use the bill to gain a foothold for fetal rights.
6. Several Liberal MPs immediately saw through the bill when it was introduced (and all Liberals and the NDP, Bloc Québécois, and Greens voted against it).

Did the Conservative MPs even read our paper? The only one we know for sure who did was Wagantall herself, although she [falsely claimed in Parliament](#) that ARCC had not sent her a copy. (We checked and her office had not opened our emails and probably deleted them.)

## What was the excuse from “pro-choice” MPs?

On June 25, we individually emailed 13 Conservative “pro-choice” MPs who had voted in favour of Bill C-311, asking them why. See the table below for results – accurate as of July 25.

First name	Last name	Riding	Prov.	Bill C-311 Vote	Response
Scott	Aitchison	Parry Sound—Muskoka	ON	Yes	No response
Luc	Berthold	Mégantic—L'Érable	QC	Yes	In May phone call, said bill was a “victory” for Conservative caucus and he will support it
Scot	Davidson	York—Simcoe	ON	Yes	No response
Michelle	Ferreri	Peterborough—Kawartha	ON	Yes	*Replied with form letter defending the bill
Bernard	Généreux	Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup	QC	Yes	No response
Joël	Godin	Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier	QC	Yes	No response
Matt	Jeneroux	Edmonton Riverbend	AB	Yes	No response
Pat	Kelly*	Calgary Rocky Ridge	AB	Yes	No response
Ron	Liepert	Calgary Signal Hill	AB	Yes	*Replied saying (in part): “Did you even read it or did you just swallow the Liberal line?”
Greg	McLean	Calgary Centre	AB	Absent	—
Eric	Melillo	Kenora	ON	Yes	No response
Michelle	Rempel-Garner	Calgary Nose Hill	AB	Yes	*Replied with link to her <a href="#">Substack article</a> defending the Bill
Alex	Ruff	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	ON	Yes	No response
Dominique	Vien	Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis	QC	Yes	No response
Ryan	Williams	Bay of Quinte	ON	Yes	No response

\*The three replies all repeated the same theme – that the text of the bill is simply about ensuring greater sentences for those who attack pregnant people and is unrelated to abortion. All three failed to acknowledge how the bill was *already* being misused to advance fetal rights and attack abortion rights.

## The Conservative Party is essentially anti-choice and right-wing

One cannot be pro-choice in a vacuum – or in this case a hotbed of growing right-wing extremism. These “pro-choice” Conservatives have signed up to a party that is largely anti-choice. Out of the 117 Conservative MPs as of June, 82 were on record as anti-choice. (The rest had an unknown stance.)

Some of these MPs like to [associate with the far right](#) and some are [anti-vaxxers](#). Their leader Pierre Poilievre recently [posed for a photo](#) with a guy wearing a “Straight Pride” T-shirt, fraternized with the [Freedom Convoy](#) in 2022, refused to disavow the [leader of a violent extremist group](#), and flirted with the “[great reset](#)” conspiracy theory in 2020. As a candidate in the Conservative Party leadership race, Poilievre hoped to [woo far-right voters](#) away from the Peoples’ Party of Canada. He is a wannabe populist and a “[phony loudmouth](#),” riding the tailcoats of the many other demagogues and right-wing politicians around the world.

Further, the Conservative Party’s [Policy Declaration](#) (2021) still contains many objectionable measures that oppose or would undermine human rights. The following are paraphrased to make clear the intended or likely meaning:

- Compelling universities to allow anti-choice expression and hate speech on campuses (19)
- Allowing healthcare workers to refuse to participate in or refer patients for abortion or medical assistance in dying (68)
- Opposing the right to medical assistance in dying (68, 77)
- Prohibiting research using embryos (75)
- Excluding abortion from Canada’s maternal and child health programs abroad. (79)
- Condemning sex-selection abortions. (89)
- Amending the human rights code to allow faith-based organizations to discriminate based on their beliefs (95)
- Changing the criteria for Canada Summer Jobs to make anti-choice groups eligible for funding again. (96)
- Supporting legislation to grant fetal personhood by making it a separate crime to harm or kill a fetus during a crime against a pregnant person. (112)
- Supporting legislation to mandate “life-saving care” and “intensive care” for fetuses born alive after an abortion. (118)
- Opposing the rights of sex workers and the decriminalization of prostitution. (120)

At the 2018 Party convention, voting members came dangerously close to dropping the policy stating: “A Conservative Government will not support any legislation to regulate abortion.” (76)

## Conclusion

Although ARCC had high hopes for a growing pro-choice presence in the Conservative caucus – which could then exert a liberalizing influence on the rest of the party – this no longer seems tenable. There is an increasing disconnect in the party between the small minority who want to support abortion rights and the majority who oppose these values. In particular, we point to the right-wing extremism of party leader Pierre Poilievre, whom ARCC has [always rated as anti-choice](#) despite his fake claims to be pro-choice.

Members of Parliament cannot truly claim to support abortion rights, and certainly not the broader values of reproductive justice, while they serve a party that fundamentally opposes those values.