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for immediate release

Harper's Reassurances About Abortion "Don't Mean a Thing"

Harper's stated position that the Conservative Party will not support or initiate abortion legislation if it forms the next government does *not* mean that abortion rights will be safe, according to Canada's national pro-choice group, the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (ARCC-CDAC). "The Conservatives can and will act to restrict abortion rights. Harper's reassurances don't mean a thing," said Joyce Arthur, a BC spokesperson for ARCC-CDAC.

During the 2004 election campaign, Harper specifically said that abortion legislation would not be tabled in his government's *first* term. Indeed, during this current campaign, he said he doesn't want "this parliament" to have an abortion debate, or have it in the "near future."

"Harper's statements and choice of language send a reassuring plea to his anti-abortion supporters to be patient—their chance will come," said Carolyn Egan, an Ontario spokesperson for ARCC-CDAC. But Egan said that Canada's national anti-abortion group, Campaign Life Coalition, is making plans to immediately start working with anti-choice MPs to outlaw abortion, starting by passing measures such as ending public funding for abortions and banning abortion pills.

Conservative Party president Don Plett has said that a backbencher MP would quickly introduce anti-abortion legislation if the Conservatives win the next government. Harper has said he will allow free votes on the abortion issue. "This means a private member's bill to restrict abortion could pass, because Harper cannot control free votes," said Arthur. "73% of the current Conservative caucus is anti-abortion, so a Conservative victory means that Parliament may have a majority of anti-abortion MPs, and a free vote on abortion has a real chance of passing."

But there's much more a Conservative government could do to restrict abortion besides pass laws, said Egan. "The Conservatives can appoint anti-abortion judges, Ministers, and bureaucrats. They can allow provinces to violate the *Canada Health Act* by not providing abortion services or not funding them. They can fund anti-abortion organizations and cut funding for family planning organizations."

Detailed information: See our election webpage – www.arcc-cdac.ca/conservative-danger.html

Press conference: January 20, 2pm EST, Morgentaler Clinic, 727 Hillside Avenue E, Toronto

Joyce Arthur	Pro-Choice Action Network, Vancouver	joycearthur@shaw.ca	604-351-0867
Celia Posyniak	Kensington Clinic, Calgary	celia@kensingtonclinic.com	403-283-9117
Dr. Suzanne Newman	Medical Director, Jane's Clinic, Winnipeg	snewman@cc.umanitoba.ca	204-477-1887
Carolyn Egan	Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics, Toronto	c.egan@sympatico.ca	416-969-8463
Catherine Megill (elle parle français)	ARCC-CDAC, Montreal	trustwomen@yahoo.com	514-486-9669
Judy Burwell	former director of the Morgentaler Clinic, Fredericton	cheznous1@rogers.com	506-460-8105 or 506-451-9060