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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before 2006 Election</th>
<th>After 2006 Election</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Anti-Choice MPs</td>
<td>93 of 306 MPs (30%)</td>
<td>100 of 308 MPs (32%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conservative Party</td>
<td>72 of 98 MPs (73%)</td>
<td>78 of 124 MPs (63%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liberal Party</td>
<td>20 of 133 MPs (15%)</td>
<td>22 of 103 MPs (21%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1 Independent</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pro-Choice*</td>
<td>140 of 308 MPs (45%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Refused to say</td>
<td>49 of 308 MPs (16%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown stance</td>
<td>19 of 308 MPs (6%)</td>
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*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 Brunooige
- 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 Lukwiski
- 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 Guarnieri
- Dan McTeague
- Borys Wrzesnewskyj
- 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 if 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