

Community Dispatch

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Canada Votes! – Affordable Housing

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VOTES!

“Just one question...”

This publication is intended to help you engage with local candidates in the federal election on October 14, 2008. It's all about social issues that impact your community; questions that matter to you; and the role that the federal government can choose to take in addressing them.

Questions raise issues. Questions require candidates to develop a clear position on where they stand. In this document, we cover thirteen social issues affecting communities nationwide today, provide sample questions you can ask your candidates, and include links to more information. By getting involved, you help shape the kind of community in which you live – all it takes is just **one question**.

Affordable Housing

The Canadian federal government has drastically reduced its role in building social housing and market rental housing since the 1980s. Because housing costs are rising across the country, and incomes are not keeping pace with the cost of living, housing insecurity is a major concern for a large portion of the population. In 2006, 1.5 million renters in Canada spent 30% or more of their household income on shelter. The federal

government could choose to increase and maintain affordable housing for Canadians through a comprehensive national housing strategy and commit funding that matches pre-1980s levels.

The federal government cancelled all funding for new nonprofit and co-op housing in 1993 and capped national social housing spending at \$2 billion a year. With promises of an additional \$1 billion for social housing under the National Homelessness Initiative of 1999, by 2006, only \$234 million had been spent. The introduction of Bill C-48 in 2005 did see a new, one-time allocation of \$1.4 billion to the May 2006 budget for affordable housing. However, with emergency shelters, transition housing, income supports for low-income families, and supportive housing units all needing sustainable funding, it is no wonder that the housing crisis continues to escalate. In 2001, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) identified 15.8% of Canadian households as being in “core need”. In 2008, four major cities in Canada (Vancouver, Victoria, Toronto, and Calgary) identified close to a 20% increase in their homeless populations since 2005.

The federal government can choose to mitigate the affordable housing crisis by keeping and increasing programs like the Federal Homelessness Strategy, Federal Housing Repair Program, and the Federal Affordable Housing Initiative. They can also choose to reverse the policy decision of 1996 that locks in a rapidly decreasing annual housing funding cut, establish a minister responsible for housing, and adopt a comprehensive and fully funded national housing program. We can choose to elect a federal government that understands the

importance of increasing affordable housing for Canadians. Ask your local candidate about their position on affordable housing.

For More Information:

Canadian Housing and Renewal Association
www.chra-achru.ca

Wellesley Institute
www.wellesleyinstitute.com

Raising the Roof
www.raisingtheroof.org

Sources

C-48 is the amendment to the federal budget that added a further \$4.6 billion in social spending, including up to \$1.6 billion for affordable housing. See http://www2.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?Language=E&Parl=38&Ses=1&Mode=1&Pub=Bill&Doc=C-48_4&File=24 for the bill itself.

Wellesley Institute. 2008 Feb. *National Housing Report Card*. <http://wellesleyinstitute.com/files/winationalhousingreportcard.pdf> (1 Sept. 2008).

Statistics Canada. 2006 June 6. *Changing patterns in Canadian homeownership and shelter costs, 2006 census*. <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/analysis/shelter/pdf/97-554-XIE2006001.pdf> (1 Sept. 2008).

Affordable Housing: Key Points & Questions

Funding for major federal housing and homelessness programs will expire in fiscal 2008.

Very little new affordable housing stock is being built and there has been an erosion of existing market rental housing stock through conversion, demolition and redevelopment.

Incomes are not keeping pace with rising housing costs, leaving many people at risk of homelessness.

Will your party extend existing federal housing and homelessness programs beyond 2009?

What role does the federal government play in addressing the housing affordability crisis in Canada?

How will you ensure a range of housing options exist for people on fixed incomes?

Canada Votes Papers 2008 is a pan-Canadian collaboration between SPARC BC, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, Community Development Halton, Human Development Council St. John, and Canadian Council on Social Development. Social planning organizations across the country are helping to strengthen communities and work on social justice issues. We also recognize the need to work together around key issues affecting our communities. We have come together to provide this publication on the federal election because we believe that democracy works best when citizens engage in dialogue on important issues.

Canada Votes papers outline key social issues and related questions that are important in this election. Asking questions is a way to make sure these issues are on the public agenda. By reading this publication and passing it on, by asking questions and talking about the issues, and especially by voting on October 14, 2008, you can help shape the kind of community in which you want to live.

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