

SEPTEMBER 20, 2006

NWT Women's Project At Risk

Ottawa/Northwest Territories – The future of women's organizations across Canada is being threatened as the Conservative Government is taking too long to review Status of Women program applications – forcing prominent women's organizations to shut down.

On Sept. 12, The National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL) closed its doors due to insufficient federal funding. The Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA) will shut down on Sept. 26. Organizations have put in applications for funding, but have heard nothing from the Minister responsible for Status of Women, Bev Oda.

“By not responding to funding applications, the Conservatives are allowing programs to shut down, one by one,” said NDP MP critic for the Status of Women Irene Mathysen. “What's next? The entire department? It looks like Bev Oda is spoiling to dismantle the Status of Women department.”

Women's groups have complained that the Minister has not consulted them on the program review and will meet with them only after the Status of Women Canada mandate has expired on Sept. 26 this year.

Western Arctic MP Dennis Bevington is concerned with the Conservative Government's ignorance of women's equality. This December marks the 25th year since Canada ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Bevington said Canada has not met its obligations, and in particular those regarding violence against women, poverty, Aboriginal women and social housing.

Gerri Sharpe-Staples, president of the Status of Women Council of the NWT, said one project being affected here in the Northwest Territories is the “Women in Mining, Oil and Gas” project, which has been awaiting funding since May. Sharpe-Staples said the future of the project is at risk, and she has no reason to believe the Conservatives will follow through on their previous commitments.

“Everyone knows that when there are funding cuts, those in rural or remote areas are the first to feel it,” said Sharpe-Staples. “Stephen Harper's Conservatives showed all of Canada where its interest lay when they scrapped the federal daycare plans. All women need to stand up and be heard. On Sept. 21 for ‘Take Back the Night,’ should we say ‘Take Back our Rights’ instead?”

Bevington challenged Harper to live up to comments made during his Aug. 17 visit to Yellowknife.

“If Prime Minister Harper is really serious about forging ahead on the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline and building ‘a competitive market economy where the resource industry can

flourish,' then he'd better realize that initiatives to introduce Northern women to non-traditional occupations in the mining, oil and gas fields are adequately funded and supported," said Bevington.

The voices of Mathyssen and newly-elected NDP federal president Anne McGrath were echoed by the entire NDP women's caucus during an Ottawa press conference earlier today on this issue. At 41 per cent, the NDP's caucus has the highest representation of women.

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