

20 Questions for B.C. Provincial Election Candidates

Go ahead! Phone 'em up! Ask 'em! You know you wanna! Or, jump up at an all-candidates forum and ask at the mike. Women in your community want to know the answers.

1. Violence against women doesn't happen in a vacuum; it exists because women's inequality exists. **What specific actions will you and your party take to ensure women achieve economic security and have full access to their Human Rights, which are both essential and intertwined components in the struggle to end violence against women?**

2. Although the BC Liberal Government has recently promised to put \$12.5 million into women's anti-violence services, mainly via women's shelters, this does not make up the \$18 million that has been cut from anti-violence services, as well as funding cut from other programs necessary to prevent violence against women from happening. **Will you and your party commit to restoring full funding to essential women's services like sexual assault centres and women's centres?**

3. In March 2003, the United Nations singled out British Columbia for special criticism after reviewing Canada's compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This is the first time a Canadian province has been singled out by the U.N. for criticism. **What has your party done/what will your party do to meet the U.N.'s requirement that BC "analyse the negative impact on women of its recent legal and other measures and amend the measures, as necessary"?**

4. The abolition of the BC Ministry of Women's Equality and the BC Human Rights Commission within the last four years has resulted in no independent bodies existing with a mandate to protect BC's citizens from discrimination. **What measures will you and your party be taking to restore the Human Rights protection that women spent decades fighting for, and how will you ensure women's full and equal access to their Human Rights?**

5. In BC, women make up the majority of our population. Unfortunately, we still remain under-represented in government. **What steps will you and your party take to address the gender**

imbalance in the Legislature in future elections?

6. Changes in government health care policies include an increase in MSP premiums, a reduction in MSP services, restrictions on eligibility for many programs, and the closure of many residential or long term care facilities (the majority of whose residents are elderly women), the closure of thousands of hospital beds, and the loss of "good" women's jobs in the health care sector. **What ways will you and your party work to ensure a more complete approach to health care, one that takes into account women's unique needs, which understands and respects the needs of rural women and girls, which does not demand women pick up the work of providing once-funded care for free, and which restores access to the services women and their families have been denied in recent years?**

7. Women in British Columbia spent 40 years fighting for pay equity legislation in the BC Human Rights Code, only to see the BC Liberal Government repeal this legislation in their first days in office. **Will you and your party reinstate women's hard-won pay equity rights?**

8. Since 2001, more than 20,000 public sector jobs (71% of which were held by women) have been eliminated by the provincial government, and at the same time, privatization and contracting out of public sector jobs have enabled the cutting of wages by nearly half - 85% of those workers whose wages have been cut are women, and mostly women of colour. **What specific strategies has your party adopted to ensure that women's equality rights are balanced with private sector interests through public sector jobs?**

9. Changes to Employment Standards Legislation gave "flexibility" to employers and weakened safeguards for workers. These changes disproportionately affect women, who make up most of part-time, minimum wage, seasonal, temporary, and contract workers in BC. **Will your party commit to restoring Employment Standards Legislation to pre-2001 standards, in order to ensure that women's basic rights are not being violated?**

10. Changes in BC's Employment Standards Legislation have left workers - including those who have been sexually harassed on the job - to fend for themselves when seeking enforcement of the Legislation via "self help kits" that are only available in English. **What will your party do to ensure that women, especially women who are vulnerable to violence and abuse in the workplace, have access to redress that includes direct, personal assistance?**

11. Many "new" jobs created over the past several years in BC have been part-time, temporary, or contractual jobs, which ghettoize women in an insecure labour market and increase their risk of poverty, and ultimately, their risk of violence and abuse. Further cuts to programs and services have pushed women and their families deeper into poverty as they attempt to stretch their limited incomes to cover these costs. **What will you and your party do to ensure a truly healthy economic climate that ensures women have equal access to an affordable education, a living wage, and full-time, secure employment?**

12. In 2002, the provincial government cut 40% of funding to the Legal Services budget in BC, slashing all of poverty law and nearly all family law legal aid. Although the government recently promised to restore 12% of what was cut, it remains that only a few women can gain access to a lawyer, and then, only under very extreme circumstances, such as in cases where a proven record of spousal violence exists. **What steps will you and your party take to ensure that women in need are not left to negotiate the justice system without legal counsel?**

13. At the BC Liberal Government was building a daycare at the Legislature for the Honourable Christy Clark, they also began drastically cut public child care system - cuts which now total over \$100 million - and also raised income thresholds for daycare subsidies, leaving many women and their children at the mercy of private, unlicensed, unregulated care. **What will you and your party do to ensure that ALL of BC's women have access to safe, affordable, accessible, and publicly-funded childcare?**

14. Child care is a major source of employment for women in BC, yet child care work pays some of the lowest wages of any jobs in the workforce. Cutbacks to childcare programs and subsidies have increased job insecurity and caused deteriorating working conditions. **What will you and your party do to ensure that the people who look after our most vulnerable citizens - our province's children - receive a living wage for their work?**

15. The freeze on tuition fees has been eliminated, and there are now no limits placed on how much colleges, universities, and other post-secondary institutions can raise their fees. **How do you and your party plan on ensuring access to post-secondary education that is affordable to women and their families?**

16. The BC Liberal Government cut \$581 million to the Ministry of Human Resources, resulting in a deep impact on women and their families with benefits like the Family Maintenance Allowance and the Earnings Exemption being completely cut. Additionally, we are the first province in Canada to have instituted time limits for accessing income supports. **Will you and your party commit to restoring the principle of the right to income when in need for all British Columbians?**

17. Although the BC Government claims to have moved a large number of individuals "off the welfare rolls," the reality is that no one knows what's happened to these individuals. In the one exit poll commissioned by the BC Government, an attempt was made only to contact one-third of former recipients, and only one-third of those with whom contact was attempted had telephones or current addresses that they could be reached at. **How will you and your party work to ensure that poor British Columbians do not continue to disappear like this?**

18. There currently exists a long and complicated process for applying for provincial disability benefits. As many as 90% of applicants are routinely denied on the first try. **How will you and your party work to reduce the barriers people with disabilities are facing when trying to negotiate the benefits application process?**

19. Aboriginal women have the highest levels of poverty in the province. The average annual income for non-Aboriginal women is \$19,350, compared with \$13,300 for Aboriginal women. This also puts Aboriginal women at a greatly increased risk for violence, abuse, murder, and "disappearance," such as we have seen in BC in recent years. **How will you and your party work to end the shameful marginalization of Aboriginal women in BC?**

20. Cuts to programs and services have done nothing to decrease the amount of work that needs to be done. Women are being forced to pick up the work and perform it for free in private homes and in communities, including extra child care, elder care, and health care provision, as well as volunteering to pick up the work once done by health care, social service, and other community organizations. **How will you and your government work to end the unfair and discriminatory practice of offloading the burden of cutbacks to programs and services onto the backs of unwaged women?**