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## STATUS OF WOMEN Conservative Party Platform

Questions by:

**The Honourable Claudette Tardif**

**Wednesday, October 21, 2009**

## THE SENATE

Wednesday, October 21, 2009

### STATUS OF WOMEN

#### CONSERVATIVE PARTY PLATFORM

**Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, today the Liberal women's caucus released the third volume of its Pink Book, *An Action Plan for Canadian Women*.

**Some Hon. Senators:** Hear, hear.

**Senator Tardif:** The Liberal Party takes women's issues seriously, as these issues are also issues of concern to all Canadians.

On the other hand, this government has cancelled the Court Challenges Program providing women with a voice before the courts; it has shut 12 Status of Women offices across the country; it has cut funding for advocacy groups and research; it has denied real pay equity; and it has reneged on early learning and child care agreements that the previous Liberal government had signed with all provinces. Women in Canada deserve better.

My question is simple: When can Canadians expect the first volume of a Conservative pink book, or is slashing former support programs the only platform this government has to offer to Canadian women?

**Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government and Minister of State (Seniors)):** Honourable senators, I understand this book is the third volume of the Pink Book. I hope it is more successful than the two previous books.

We in the government, we on this side of the chamber and we in the Conservative Party do not have to put out a Pink Book to demonstrate our commitment to women's issues.

**Some Hon. Senators:** Hear, hear.

**Senator LeBreton:** As a matter of fact, our political party gave women the vote and our political party had the first woman cabinet minister.

We have this age-old argument in this chamber that the programs in place under the honourable senator's government should have been carried forward automatically by this government. When we came into office, we were elected on our own platform.

• (1400)

To quote a famous woman in the Liberal Party, when she talked about the Liberal child care program, she said it was a cash cow for government. That was Sheila Copps.

We believe in the full participation of women in Canada's economic, social and democratic life. I am proud that we have the highest proportion of women appointed to cabinet in the history of the country. In this past election, our party showed its commitment to the political engagement of women by electing the most of all parties, 23, representing 37 per cent of Conservative female candidates nominated.

There is this mythology that somehow or other we cut funding to the Status of Women. We did not; we increased funding. Typical Liberal policy was to have several people sitting in offices talking to each other. We put money in the communities to help women where they work and live. That is what we did.

As honourable senators know, the Minister of State for the Status of Women is working on developing an Action Plan for Women. As a woman, I am quite insulted that Senator Tardif would think that, somehow or other, the Liberal Party has a corner on the women's market. It does not.

Senator Milne is shaking her head because she does not like what I am saying.

During her statement, I heard Senator Jaffer talking about all the things Jean Chrétien did for women. I was once in a position to do something for women, and it involved appointments. In the prior Liberal government, less than 15 per cent of appointees were women, and they held all the stereotypical positions — various health boards, Employment Insurance, and the like.

When we came into government, we named women to the head of the Export Development Corporation, the Civil Aviation Tribunal and the Veterans Review and Appeal Board. We raised the number of women in major positions from less than 15 per cent to 33 per cent. By the way, one of the appointments that we made as a government was none other than Mobina Jaffer.

**Senator Tardif:** Honourable senators, it is obvious that this issue is a very sensitive one for the government.

[*Translation*]

It is also obvious, honourable senators, that the Conservative government does not see things through rose-coloured glasses. Under this government, the word "equality" was erased from the Status of Women Canada mandate. But equal rights are a fundamental value of Canadian society.

When will the government stop silencing organizations that fight for women's equality? When can women expect to see the Court Challenges Program reinstated?

[*English*]

**Senator LeBreton:** Honourable senators may think I am a little emotional about this issue. I am emotional, because I am sick and tired of the mythology and this idea that only Liberals can speak for women. That is simply not the case.

In terms of equality, our government actually increased the budget of programs under Status of Women Canada by 42 per cent. That is 42 per cent more than was spent on the Women's Program under the previous government.

I get emotional about this issue because I know what I am speaking about. I was involved in advancing and promoting women for many years in the Conservative Party, and I am extremely proud of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, of the women we have in our cabinet and of the commitment we have to women in this country.