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fACT sheet

2011 Federal Election Analysis



edmonton
SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL

Introduction

This Fact Sheet highlights federal issues most affecting Edmontonians with low and modest incomes. Links to the platforms of the major federal political parties are provided at the end of the *fACT sheet*. We invite you to see for yourself which of the platform positions of the federal parties do the most to lift more Edmontonians out of poverty and improve the lives of those with modest incomes.

A Federal Poverty Reduction Strategy

As an active participant in several national coalitions, the ESPC has been at the forefront of efforts to urge the federal government to adopt a national poverty reduction strategy with firm targets and timelines for implementation. Examine the platforms of the federal political parties to see which have made commitments to a federal poverty reduction strategy. Then look under the hood to see whether the commitments are backed up by the types of specific investments needed to achieve success.

Retirement Security

Fewer working Canadians are enrolled in employer pension plans, especially defined benefit plans that pay a fixed income upon retirement. With the Canadian population gradually aging, all of the political parties have made proposals to improve retirement security. The most effective way to improve the retirement security of modest income workers would be to gradually increase benefits paid through the Canada Pension Plan (CPP). This could be done by gradually increasing the amounts contributed by employers and employees to the CPP. The greatest benefit of modest increases to CPP contributions would be to younger workers who are the least likely to have adequate pensions.

Guaranteed Income Supplement

The Guaranteed Income Supplement is a non-contributory plan that is supposed to ensure that no Canadian over the age of 65 lives in poverty. Over the years the real value of GIS benefits has eroded. In examining the platforms of the federal parties, pay attention to both the total amount pledged to enhance the GIS as well as the proportion of the increases that goes to the lowest income seniors.

Working Income Tax Benefit

The Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB) is an incentive for low income Canadians to seek and retain jobs by supplementing their earnings from paid employment. This refundable benefit was first introduced in 2007 and enhanced in 2009. Current supplements to employment earnings range up to a maximum of \$925 per year for singles and \$1,680 per year for families. The WITB is a very useful program that reduces poverty by rewarding work. Campaign 2000 is urging the federal parties to commit to a further 50% increase in the WITB.

Employment Insurance & Skills Training

Just over one in three unemployed Edmontonians receive employment insurance benefits. Reforms that make it easier to qualify for benefits include: decreasing the number of hours needed to qualify for benefits; and extending benefits to a maximum of 50 weeks regardless of where in Canada an unemployed person lives, especially for long-tenured workers with no previous claims. Federal skills training programs are mostly funded through the Employment Insurance program. At minimum, transfers to provinces and territories for skills training, and additional training or re-training opportunities, should be maintained at 2010-11 levels. Special programs and partnerships need to be made for disadvantaged groups like Aboriginal people, young people, foreign professionals seeking credentials recognition, and racialized communities.

Revenue Measures

Taxes and other government revenues are the price Canadians pay for living in a civilized society with a highly developed social safety net. The political parties have different priorities when it comes to both the level of taxes Canadians pay and who pays them. There is little benefit in having low levels of taxation if the result is big deficits or an inability to fund key programs.

Affordable Housing

According to the 2006 Census, one in four Edmonton households who rent live in accommodations that are too small, in need of major repairs and/or unaffordable. Affordable housing organizations like the Canadian Housing Renewal Association are seeking commitments from the federal parties to: adopt a national affordable housing strategy; at a minimum maintain 2010-11 funding levels for social housing; renew and double funding for federal/provincial cost-shared agreements for building and renovating affordable housing; and making the Eco-Energy Home Retrofit Program (which partially subsidizes home energy efficiency improvements) permanent while adding a low income component.

Canada Child Tax Benefits/National Child Benefit Supplement

No program (federal or provincial) does more to lift families with children out of poverty than federal child tax benefits including the supplement for low income families. Unlike provincial social assistance with their demeaning means testing, all that is required to receive federal child tax benefits is filing an income tax return. Campaign 2000 estimates that - to lift every Canadian family out of poverty - the maximum amount per child would need to increase by about \$2000 to \$5400 per year. Examine the platforms to see which of the federal parties are prepared to increase child tax benefits beyond normal indexing.

Early Childhood Development and Child Care

More than 70% of mothers with pre-school children are in the paid labour force. Quality, universal, accessible, and affordable early childhood education and care (ECEC) that is developmental for children and supports parents in education, training and work is a critical social infrastructure investment. While provinces including Alberta are investing to improve ECEC services, the federal government must do more to both increase accessibility and reduce the financial burden these services place on modest income families.

Aboriginal Edmontonians

The 2006 Census found that Edmonton's 52,000 urban Aboriginal population (First Nations, Metis and Inuit) is the second largest in Canada. Edmonton's Aboriginal people are young and growing at a rate twice as fast as the overall population. Through the Urban Aboriginal Accord and the Wicihitwion Circle of Shared Responsibility & Stewardship, a strong foundation for Aboriginal partnership is being forged at the municipal level. Check the platforms to see how well they respond to the concerns of urban Aboriginal peoples in key areas like self-governance, housing, health and wellness, justice, children and youth, education, employment and training, and economic development.

Canadians with Disabilities

The Caledon Institute on Social Policy and national disability organizations are proposing that the existing nonrefundable federal Disability Tax Credit be converted to a refundable credit for claimants between the ages of 18 and 65 to compensate partly for the added costs of disability, so that it applies to all Canadian residents of working age with disabilities, regardless of income. As a refundable credit, the full amount would be available to all eligible recipients whether or not they pay income tax.

Health and Social Transfers

All of the federal political parties have committed to maintaining increases in health transfers to the provinces beyond the 2013-14 expiry of the Health Accord. Social transfers to support post-secondary education, social services and child care increase at only half the rate of health transfers. There is currently less assurance that social transfers will continue after 2013-14.

Link to major federal party platforms (alphabetical order):

Conservative Party of Canada: http://www.conservative.ca/policy/platform_2011

Green Party of Canada: <http://greenparty.ca/platform2011>

Liberal Party of Canada: <http://www.liberal.ca/platform>

New Democratic Party of Canada: <http://www.ndp.ca/platform>

Federal Election Resources:

Make Poverty History: <http://www.makepovertyhistory.ca/vote>

Assembly of First Nations: http://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/11-04-04_afn_2001_federal_election_priorities_fe.pdf

Dignity for All Campaign: <http://www.dignityforall.ca/>

Canadian Housing and Renewal Association: <http://chra-achru.ca/en/index.php/our-work/election-2011/>

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives: <http://federalectionblog.ca/>

