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**DEAR POLLSTERS:
ARE YOU TALKING TO US?**

**AN OPEN LETTER
Edmonton AB
June 21, 2004**

An active movement is afoot in this country, and it appears to have missed the radar of pundits and polling firms.

The biggest story to not get covered is that thousands of concerned voters are mobilizing around issues of women's equality.

The Coalition for Women's Equality calls traffic to its own website "astounding." Coordinator Pam Kapoor says the site, "has received a shocking 150,000 hits since we launched two weeks ago. We got 22,000 hits in just one day - the day following the leaders' debate. These numbers are stunning, and telling."

"Talk about a large sample - bigger than any polled by EKOS or Ipsos-Reid. This buzz is the biggest story around. Where's the coverage on it?"

Dozens of related internet sites have cropped up to promote women's issues to voters and politicians and to engage women voters in the political process.

"Clearly, thousands of voters want to hear and talk about women's equality this election."

In the flurry of polling data that has besieged voters during the election campaign, we are hard-pressed to hear anything of the deep-held concerns of women about equality. "It's as if women don't even exist," suggests Melanie Cishecki of Mediawatch, "Pollsters are well aware of the political gender gap, yet tend to only put general questions into the field about women's voting intentions."

Politicians and media types frequently discuss voting differences based on regions and income, but rarely gender. Past polling has indicated that significantly fewer men than women support issues such as health, social programs, environmental protection, and child care, and significantly more men than women are interested in tax cuts and military issues.

At elections desks in the newsrooms of national mainstream media, women seldom make the cut for story of the day. Part of the reason is that politicians aren't making women's equality an issue either.

"Surely the voters in any given polling sample would be capable of responding to deeper questions about poverty, discrimination, pay equity, and violence against women," says Kapoor.

"Are the pollsters, on behalf of the parties who commission their data, averse to what we might tell them?"

The political gender gap in Canada is growing. New Brunswick writer Rosella Melanson cites one pollster as blaming "an election agenda that is closer to the male agenda than the female agenda". Melanson also cites an Alberta political scientist as saying "what women want (strong social programs) is contrary to the consensus of the elites so the parties have tried to make women disappear."

We challenge ALL POLLING FIRMS engaged in electoral statistics to stimulate dialogue on the key issues outlined in the *Still in Shock* paper. The grounds for such polling information are crystal clear.

Support for this call is widespread. Earlier this week, communiqués calling for more discussion by the party leaders about women's equality were issued by national organizations as well as regional groups including the Status of Women Council of NWT, One Woman One Vote in Edmonton, the DisAbled Women's Network, BC Coalition of Women's Centres, Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women in Newfoundland/Labrador, the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses, and la Fédération des femmes du Québec, to name a few. Dozens more community-based organizations did the same.

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For more information, contact:

