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For Immediate Release  
Edmonton AB

**LAST MINUTE ADVICE TO PARTIES:  
WANT OUR VOTE? COMMIT TO PAYING  
DOWN THE DEBT OWED TO WOMEN**

**Tax cuts for some. Social deficit for the rest of us.**

The Coalition for Women's Equality (CWE) says thanks to neo-Conservative policies of deficit reduction and inequitable tax cuts over the past 20 years, whichever government is elected on June 28<sup>th</sup> has to make it the first order of business to **pay down the enormous debt** owed to women in Canada.

"The most disadvantaged in Canada have born the cost of the so-called "fiscal prudence" that has guided recent governments," says Charlotte Thibault of the Feminist Alliance for International Action, "This prudence has directly resulted in a reduction or blockage of access to programs and services for women."

As part of an equality deficit reduction plan, the Coalition will demand of the next government the **immediate creation of a Parliamentary Committee on Women's Equality.**

The Coalition claims that a lack of integrated gender-based analysis inside government processes has yielded legislation and policies that impact negatively on women. Currently, there are unevenly dispersed mechanisms among government that examine gender. A Standing Committee on Women's Equality would allow parliamentarians to ask critical questions of government branches such as "What measurable steps have you taken towards women's equality in your departmental initiatives?"

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Cuts to unemployment insurance and reduced transfer payments for social assistance have decreased access for women. A restructuring of the unemployment insurance program to base qualification on hours and not weeks has meant that fewer women working part-time qualify. As social assistance programs have become increasingly inaccessible to the women who make up a large part of the working poor, the federal government has turned over the reins to provincial governments to manage.

Harmful government policies and blatant disregard for feasible recommendations from equality-seeking women's groups have fostered a skeptical electorate. Says Kapoor, "There's no accountability for women's equality in the governance process - its no wonder voters are suspicious of election platforms that make promises to women. A Parliamentary Committee mandated to scrutinize equality issues in government activities might temper the distrust."

The Coalition says the next government's equality deficit reduction plan must also include an end to women's poverty and the criminalization of women attempting to survive it.

The 19% poverty rate amongst adult women in Canada is now the highest it has been in two decades. Not only has Canada failed to live up to its international commitments with respect to women's equality, regressive fiscal policies have actually contributed to deepening women's inequality across the country.

Says Pam Kapoor, Coordinator of the CWE, "Women across Canada will be voting for a government that will reduce the social deficit to zero by paying women back. Seriously."

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