

Harris ignores womens' issues

Editor:

At the All Candidates Forum at College of New Caledonia Monday, Dick Harris took credit for supporting Quesnel Women's Resource Centre, one of the co-sponsors of the forum.

Dick Harris has said publicly he is an accessible MP and he stands on his record.

This is our experience. The Women's Centre spent some months trying to arrange a meeting with him to ask for support from him for a proposal we were making to the Beetle Action fund that would look at the impact on women of a changing economy. We finally nailed down a time when he would be in the area and eight women took time off work to come and meet with him. He never showed up and never called to apologize. We tried again and set up another time with his office for some weeks later. Again he was a no-show so we tracked down his cell phone number and we asked whether he was intending on coming. An hour later he did come.

We asked for assistance with our proposal. He agreed but we never heard from him again. There was no acknowledgement he received the proposal or any report on anything he might have done to help. When we asked him about his purported support for the Women's Centre after the forum, he couldn't

remember meeting us or meeting with us!

For the record, the \$10,000 Dick Harris claimed in his promotion material to have brought to Quesnel Women's Resource Centre was never given to or received by the Centre. In fact, when the Conservatives came to power they cut all Women's Centres funding completely.

Quesnel, along with dozens of other small centres from the across the country historically received small funding grants from Status of Women Canada. Our Centre, for 25 years, received in the range of \$20,000 - \$25,000 each year - the main way the Women's Centre stayed open and provided services in the community. Now, the small pocket of funding that Status of Women still gives out yearly has been diverted to large scale urban-based projects. In addition, the Conservatives have eliminated the main mandate of the Status of Women department, promoting equality of women, from its agenda.

For the record, the universal day care program set in motion before the Conservatives took power was cancelled. Instead, families get \$100 per month, which unlike a universal system would cover the cost of 2.5 days of care per month or alternatively, 2.5 boxes of diapers.

Violence against women is a huge issue and right in our area, the list

of women who have disappeared or being murdered continues to grow. Every three days, in Quesnel, RCMP receives a call for help from a woman who is being assaulted. Research shows that calls to RCMP reflect only a small minority of the actual incidents of violence. Where are the Conservative initiatives to "get tough" on this crime?

Instead, tuition fees continue to rise as the federal government refuses to increase its grants for post-secondary education. Employment Insurance support has been going to males taking short-term apprenticeship programs, while women who do go back to school risk accumulating huge debt loads.

Unable to improve education and training leaves women with fewer economic options to escape violence. And women are still poorer than men by a substantial margin. On average, women in Quesnel who work at full-time, full-year jobs make \$.60 for every dollar earned by men in our community.

The Conservative record of support for women is dismal. I urge all women to question Dick Harris about his support for issues of importance to women before they vote next Tuesday.

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Collective member

Quesnel Women's Resource Centre