

RUTHLESS

Ontario Common Front & Ontario Federation of Labour

The Harper Record on
Income, Equality and
Canada's Social Safety Net

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The Harper tax giveaways, mainly for the rich and corporations, add up to \$45 billion per year. That means our country has \$45 billion less to pay for programs from health to old age security; programs and services that benefit all Canadians and improve equality.

Old Age Security

Harper's promised tax cuts will be mainly paid off by cuts to health care and old age security. Harper plans to increase the age of eligibility for Old Age Security to 67 years old, forcing lower and mid-income seniors to work more years before they can retire.

Environment

The Harper government has placed Canada among the worst governments in the developed world on climate change. Harper refused to meet our country's promised targets under the Kyoto Protocol (an agreement among governments around the world to protect our planet by reducing greenhouse gas emissions). Even personal energy-saving programs have been axed. In 2010, the Harper government ended the Energuide for Houses program that provided trained environmental evaluators to help Canadians inspect their homes and find opportunities to reduce wasted energy.

The Big Shift

Massive Tax Cuts for Wealthy & Corporations Paid for by Major Cuts to Social Programs that Improve Living Standards for All Canadians

More than any federal government in Canada's history, the Harper government has systematically emptied the public treasury and cut social programs. Harper's tax cuts mainly benefit the wealthy and corporations. For example, from the middle class to the poorest, the bottom 60% of Canadian income earners will only see \$50 a year on average from Harper's income splitting scheme. The wealthiest will get up to \$2,000. After giving away billions this way, the government then claims it can no longer afford social programs that benefit all Canadians and improve equality. For most, our tax cuts will be more than wiped out by cuts to services we need and use.

Slash & Burn

The budget record of the Harper government shows that tax cuts have been paid for by carefully targeted cuts to social programs, public agencies and even charities that Harper does not like. Here is a sampling:

Health Care

Harper plans dramatic cuts to the funding formula for health care. Harper also cut health care for refugees and veterans, refused to meet with the provinces to improve drug coverage and home care. Provincial and territorial governments calculate that Harper's health cuts total \$36 billion over the next decade. The Parliamentary Budget Office warns that Harper's planned reduction in the share of health funding will force the provinces to cut public health care services for Canadians. In plain language, it is a prescription for privatization.

Civil Service & Government Funded Scientists

Harper is close to the oil patch industries. He has spent his political career opposing public services. Federal civil servants have paid the price. The civil

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service has been slashed and muzzled. 35,000 public service jobs have been cut or are currently being cut. Government-funded scientists, who normally report their findings in international conferences, complain that they have been silenced, particularly those researching issues related to climate change.

Arts & Culture

In 2008, Harper cut arts and cultural program funding by \$45 million. Harper said arts are a “niche” concern, not supported by ordinary Canadians. His government also backed controversial legislation that would give the Heritage Minister power to block tax incentives for movies deemed objectionable by the government.

Through Harper’s tenure, CBC, the National Film Board and Telefilm have been ignored, at best. But in 2012, Harper, who has been extremely critical of the CBC, took his axe to the public broadcaster. That year, the government cut another \$191 million from arts and cultural programs. The CBC was hit by a whopping \$115 million of those cuts. Telefilm, the National Film Board, the Library of Archives, and a host of cultural programs made up the rest of those cuts.

The Census

In 2006, Harper cut Statistics Canada by \$15 million. In 2010, Harper eradicated the mandatory long-form census. Though it framed the issue as one of personal choice (it is your choice not to fill out the census) in truth this move stymies groups seeking data to track inequality among various types of population groups.

Human Rights

In 2006, the Harper government cut funding to the court challenges program. This program gave Canadians the financial opportunity to challenge unfair legislation, including challenges under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The ability for Canadians to raise challenges to laws that are discriminatory is an essential “check and balance” for our democracy. The program had supported some successful challenges against discrimination based on sexuality and gender. In 2008, the program was reinstated but only for court challenges on linguistic rights, purposely leaving out other forms of discrimination.

Charities & Humanitarian Groups

Under Harper’s government the charitable status of organizations that have been critical of government policies and corporate interest have been put under investigation, threatening their funding. Even tiny groups like a Southwestern Ontario bird-watching association that had written in their newsletter about

environmental concerns, have had their charitable status put under review. Humanitarian groups like Oxfam and Amnesty International have been hit with this, along with progressive policy groups like the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Women’s Advocacy and Pay Equity

The budget for the Status of Women, a women’s advocacy organization was slashed by more than 40% by the Harper government in 2006, shuttering 12 of 16 Status of Women offices across Canada and axing the research fund. Funding was also cut to the National Association of Women and the Law. That year, Harper cancelled the National Child Care Program. In 2009, the euphemistically-named “Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act” was brought in by the Harper government. Women’s organizations and lawyers have criticized this legislation for widening the ability for legalized pay *inequality* for women, limiting the rights for women to file Human Rights complaints for unequal pay, and reducing the ability of women to seek pay equity.

In 2010, the Harper government cut all federal funding for dozens of women’s programs and agencies including: the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, Conseil d’intervention pour access des femmes au travail, Match International, New Brunswick Pay Equity Coalition, Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses, Reseau de Tables regionales de groupes de femmes du Quebec, Alberta Network of Immigrant Women, Womenspace Resource Centre (Alberta), Centre de documentation sur l’education des adultes et la condition feminine, Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, Association feminine d’education et d’action sociale, Feminists for Just and Equitable Public Policy (Nova Scotia), and more.

First Nations/Aboriginal Programs

In 2006, the Harper government singled out Aboriginal/First Nations programs and services for particularly harsh cuts. Approximately \$70 million in services were cut in the first year. Harper refused to honour the Kelowna Accord which would have set aside \$5 billion in funding for Aboriginal programs including health care, education and social services. He also refused to sign the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, signed by 114 other countries. In 2010, Harper cut the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, resulting in devastating cuts to 134 Foundation-funded healing projects, including programs for survivors of sexual assault, counselling for addictions and anger-management and suicide prevention programs.