

Candidates Forum Question  
VPL, Alice MacKay Room  
Friday, April 29, 2005

---

Women's Ministry (Susanna Tam)

**Preamble:** In 2001, the newly elected provincial government eliminated the first and only free-standing Ministry of Women's Equality in this country. As well, in April 2004, the provincial government cut the annual \$47,000 core grant to each of BC's 37 women's centres.

**Question #1:** Will your party, if it is elected to form government on May 17, re-establish a free-standing Ministry of Women's Equality with a budget and staff levels that ensure the Ministry can have a meaningful impact on furthering women's equality and social justice in this province?

**Question #2:** Will your party immediately restore women's centres funding and as a starting point commit to providing each women's centre with a \$50,000 annual core grant linked to an annual increase at the rate of inflation?

Health Care

**Preamble:** The Medical Services Plan premium, which is an additional tax to access health care in BC, was increased by 50% on May 1, 2002. At the same time that MSP premiums were increased the provincial government cut services covered by MSP, for example eye examinations, physiotherapy, and chiropractic care, among other services. Women are particularly affected by increases in user fees and off-loading costs because many women do not have an extended health benefits plan and on average have lower incomes than men.

**Question #1:** Will your party, if it is elected to form government on May 17, immediately rollback MSP premiums to the 2002 levels and restore coverage for the health services that were cut from the plan in the last four years?

**Question #2:** Will your party eliminate the MSP premium within your first term in office?

Legal Aid (Margot Young)

**Preamble:** More women access legal aid than men. Currently, family law - including custody, access and maintenance - is not covered by legal aid and cuts to legal aid funding continue. As well, in 2001 the newly elected provincial

government continued the practice of funneling the social services tax into the general revenue fund, as opposed to dedicating the proceeds to legal aid.

**Question #1:** Will your party, if it is elected to form government on May 17, dedicate the social services tax and the legal aid transfer payments received from the federal government to fund only legal aid?

**Question #2:** Will your party restore funding for legal aid to at least pre-2001 levels?

## Child Care (Susanna Tam)

**Preamble:** The federal government is committed to putting \$5 billion over the next 5 years into a national child care plan. Women all over BC will tell you that currently there are not enough non-profit child care spaces available and that fees are too high.

**Question:** How will your government ensure that these federal dollars will be used to establish a regulated system of child care in BC that is affordable, high quality and accessible to all families who need it?

## Women's Work

**Preamble:** In 2002, the BC government legislatively removed important provisions from freely-negotiated collective agreements that led to the layoff of 8,000 health care workers. It ushered in contracting out of hospital support services to large corporations that pay workers between \$9-\$12 an hour with minimal benefits. This low-wage economic strategy – condemned by two UN agencies – along with a government-imposed 15% wage rollback on health care workers has devalued women's work and set women's equality gains back more than thirty years!

**Question:** What will your party do to recognize the value of women's work to our society, restore decent wages and adequate pensions to working women and further the advancement of women's equality?

## Social Assistance (Margot Young)

**Preamble:** In 2002, the BC government cut rates for social assistance. It also narrowed eligibility rules - adding time limits, a 3-week waiting period, deeming single mothers "employable" when their youngest child is 3 not 7, and requiring recipients to have lived outside their parents' home for 2 years.

**Question:** Will your party, if it is elected to form government on May 17, raise social assistance rates to a level that will ensure that women receiving social assistance can meet their basic needs for food, clothing and shelter?