



CCRL Backgrounder: *Federal Election 2008* Questions to ask your candidates

Canadians will go to the polls Oct. 14. The Catholic Civil Rights League does not endorse any political party, but we certainly work hard on issues that have political overtones. We encourage our supporters to vote for the best candidate in their riding, regardless of party. Some of the issues we have worked on recently fall wholly or partly under federal jurisdiction, and form a good starting point for questions to ask candidates.

- The use of the federal Human Rights Commission in free speech cases. Given today's social climate, the right to the peaceable expression and publication of opinion based on religious beliefs is not guaranteed in Canada if the content involves a prohibited ground for discrimination. The League has been publicizing this problem, and providing what help we can, since the late 90s. Complainants can bring charges for little or no cost, while defendants must pay their own, often considerable expenses to defend themselves. While some of the recent higher-profile cases involve both federal and provincial commissions (the latter have some variation in the type of cases they hear), the federal government could take the lead by dropping or significantly revising Section 13, which addresses the electronic transmission of so-called "hate" speech. Such re-vamping would help safeguard freedom of religion and freedom of speech while supporting the equality of all people in the provision of goods and services.

- The process for nominating candidates to the Order of Canada. The nomination of Henry Morgentaler to the Order made people aware of how a process that may have worked well at one time now can be used to promote honours for extremely controversial individuals. The League is now working to improve this process. Ask your candidates if they supported Morgentaler's nomination. Their answers or evasions could tell you a great deal about their attitudes to life issues.

- With the dissolving of the 39th Parliament, Bill C-484 (Unborn Victims of Crime) died on the Order Paper, but not before Justice Minister Rob Nicholson announced that the government would bring in alternative legislation to strengthen sentencing provisions in cases of violence against pregnant women. Even though the Private Member's Bill specifically excluded abortion from its attempt to recognize two victims in such crimes, pro-abortion forces appear to have been successful in their efforts to portray it as a first step to re-criminalizing abortion. League members probably already know where their MPs stood on this legislation, but it's another topic worth raising with new candidates.

- Private Member's Bill C-562, introduced by Bloc Quebecois MP Francine Lalonde, also died on the Order Paper. The proposed bill, based on the euthanasia and assisted suicide proposal introduced by Ms. Lalonde in 2005, would amend the Criminal Code to permit euthanasia and physician-

assisted suicide in some circumstances. As similar proposals will likely continue to be brought forward, it's another topic worth raising.

- The role of the CRTC in granting licenses to Canadian broadcasting endeavours. The CRTC recently approved a pornographic television channel provided it can find a carrier. Not long afterward, two proposals for Christian radio outlets were denied. Many people believe the CRTC's role is less pivotal in today's market, as people increasingly take what they want – for good and for ill – from the Internet. While there is some truth in this argument, Canadian providers still cannot get onto public airspace in traditional broadcast media without the agency's approval. Ask your candidates if they thought these recent decisions were the right ones.

The League will continue its work in defense of life and freedom of religion with the new government. In addition to the League's news update service, topical election information is available from the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition (epcc.ca) and Campaign Life Coalition (campaignlifecoalition.com). REAL Women of Canada (realwomen-ca.com) has issued a pamphlet comparing the positions of the three main English language parties on a number of family issues.

The Social Affairs Commission of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (cccbb.ca) has issued an article about public issues of special concern for Catholics.