



For Immediate Release
January 11th, 2007

Conservative Appointments Insensitive to Families Facing Infertility

Ottawa - The minority Conservative government's recent appointments to the Assisted Human Reproduction Agency demonstrate their insensitivity to prospective Canadian parents who are shouldering great hardship and cost to have a child, Liberal Health Critic Ruby Dhalla and former Liberal Public Health Minister Carolyn Bennett said today.

"What is most striking about these long-awaited appointments is that there is a glaring omission of fertility experts, patients and stem cell scientists," said Ms. Dhalla. "This agency was created to help Canadian couples have children. Instead of appointing scientists, counselors and representatives of families who are struggling to conceive - people who want to help families - they are appointing people who have little to no experience with this complex and emotional issue."

The Conservative government recently appointed 10 of 13 board members to the Assisted Human Reproduction Agency, which will regulate fertility clinics and treatments associated with assisted human reproduction. The government also pushed back the deadline for the board to put forward new regulations for stem cell research and assisted human reproduction by two years, further demonstrating their ideological opposition to these scientific advances.

"These appointments, together with the delay in introducing new guidelines, have outraged both couples waiting for treatment to start a family and fertility specialists across the country, and it's no wonder," Dr. Bennett said. "The lack of sensitivity to families struggling with infertility shows yet again that this government is driven by right-wing ideology instead of trying to achieve public policy that meets the needs of Canadians."

Ms. Dhalla and Dr. Bennett have joined representatives of the Canadian infertility community in calling on the Harper government to bring balance and fair representation to the remaining three appointments by appointing at least one patient representative, a doctor who has specialized in infertility and a medical health professional experienced in counseling infertile patients.

"I'm disappointed in the way this government has handled the appointments to this very important agency. Their tremendous insensitivity and lack of compassion is shameful, and I am sorry for all those families who must continue to wait to start a family," Dr. Bennett said.

The Assisted Human Reproduction Act passed under the previous Liberal

government, which provides for the establishment of the Agency, demands that "the membership of the Board of Directors must reflect a range of backgrounds and disciplines relevant to the Agency's objectives." As currently constituted, the board fails to meet even its own standard, as it includes neither infertile couples nor those with the scientific experience necessary to understand the complexities of the processes involved.

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