Dear Mr. Ignatieff,

I just finished reading your book *True Patriot Love*. I was touched by your description of what it means to love one’s country. True patriot love, you say, is not necessarily a love of what one’s country is, but of what it might become. You write: “the real country, the object of love and longing, is an imagined place on the horizon that we hope to reach one day, if we can marshal sufficient courage, faith and determination.” And you say that the purpose of political life is to narrow the gap between the land we live in and the land we can imagine. That has been the goal of my life—to narrow the gap between the Canada we live in and the Canada that I and many other women can imagine.

It is striking to me then that this book, which is mainly about your Grant forefathers’ ideas of Canada and their involvement in the development of the country, has no foremothers in it. There are women that your forefathers loved, but you seem to have no female intellectual ancestors.

Of course, a book called *True Patriot Love* is about loving the patris, or fatherland. But when that book is written in 2008, it is notable that there is still no sense of the mothers or of a coexisting motherland. You do not remark on the important absence of the women in anyone’s history-telling, including your forefathers’, nor do you embed women, with our centuries of experience of caring and community-building, in your vision of the future of Canada. Quebec, Aboriginal communities and Canada’s racially and culturally diverse people figure in your vision, yet women do not. This invisibility of women is shocking in a book written by a leader of a Canadian political party in the 21st century.

The absence of women matters deeply because I am looking for a political party and a prime minister for women, since there will be another federal election soon. I agree with you that Canada can do better. Right now, we have the worst government I have seen in my lifetime. We could be doing so much better for ourselves and for the rest of the world. I agree with you that Mr. Harper’s time is up. His administration has been nasty and brutish; it should be short.

One good reason it should be short is because his is an overtly anti-woman regime. Mr. Harper’s administration has made cruel assaults on programs that are important to women, eliminated women’s access to the use of our Charter rights, abandoned our first real chance in years at a national child-care program, gutted equal pay protections for women who are federal civil servants and attacked the puny Status of Women Canada program that once supported some participation of women’s non-governmental organizations in policy-making. More covertly, and with even broader effect, Harper’s government is shrinking the positive, redistributive role of the government, pulling government back from playing any active role in creating equality for women.

That is why I support your effort to defeat Mr. Harper. But that still leaves the question for me and for millions of
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A country must have a social vision. Social programs do not need to be designed or delivered in uniform ways, and Canada can easily recognize the differences that the collective rights of the people of Quebec and of Aboriginal peoples make to social program delivery. But a coherent, reliable social program infrastructure is central to any country committed to the equality of its people.

A Canada in which women can flourish is, by definition, a Canada of high-speed rail lines and better east-west energy grids, but not a Canada where there is an east-west (and north) grid of core social programs that ensures the basic components of a decent life for everyone.

The federal government has withdrawn from the social policy field in other ways, too, not just by changing over to unconditional transfers. For example, Canada, unlike virtually every other developed country in the world, has no national housing strategy anymore.

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So a political party and a prime minister for women need to show leadership on the social program front. No federal leadership on social spending means that women do not have a country to belong to, only a province.

You have much to answer for. The Liberals gave us unconditional transfer payments in 1995 and cut the transfers, too, in order to retire the deficit. The repeated claim that the Lib-
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This volume, published to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the publication of Sara Ruddick’s *Maternal Thinking*, explores the impact and influence this book has had on maternal scholarship and revisits what motherhood scholars regard as the pivotal insight of Ruddick’s text: motherwork is a practice that is informed by “maternal thinking.” The book includes 17 contributors from disciplines as diverse as anthropology, sociology, literature, philosophy, education, women’s studies and psychology and features a conversation with and an epilogue by Sara Ruddick.

“I was transformed by Sara Ruddick’s *Maternal Thinking* when it was first published. Now we have a stunning collection of essays by writers, social scientists, philosophers and activists illustrating how profound an effect the very idea of ‘maternal thinking,’ in all its implications, has had on them. I was educated and moved, reminded and expanded, by the writers whose work fills this crucial collection.”

—JANE LAZARRE, author of *The Mother Knot*

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eral Party is the valiant David who slayed the Goliath—deficit is too thin by now because, years later, we can see the long-lasting damage done by the way the deficit was defeated—by cutting social spending so deeply and so fast, and by backing the federal government out of social policy. Also, when the surpluses started to roll in so soon, in 1998, the Liberals did not repair the damage. With this record, and now in a time of more deficits, it is crucial not to cut social spending again. We need social programs strategically rebuilt through the period of recession and deficit, not dismantled even further. Canadian voters—women and men, too—need to know where you stand.

Ed Broadbent told the NDP convention recently that it was time to mount an all-out attack on inequality in Canada. I agree. Not bits and pieces, but a planned, comprehensive, stay-the-course strategy. Of course, Ed Broadbent does not mean women’s inequality; he means the inequality that is created for everyone when resources are not shared and fairly distributed. An attack on inequality and an attack on women’s inequality are overlapping strategies; they could be mutually supportive.

But we cannot forget that women’s inequality is particular and complicated by racism and disability discrimination; it cannot be achieved through gender- or race- or disability-neutral strategies. The patterns of women’s lives are different from men’s in central ways—women need reliable supports in place for all caregiving, and fair pay for caregiving work in the paid labour force.

Women contend with men’s violence and sexual abuse; we need that violence to stop, and we need adequate income supports and affordable housing so that women and children can leave violent men and survive. If we tackle social and economic inequality broadly, with a sophisticated commitment to women, we can move towards equality for all women and children and men.

I fear that in the next election the Liberals will offer women scraps, but not vision. I expect you will promise to reverse some of Harper’s ugliest assaults—the cancellation of the Court Challenges Program, the twisted Status of Women funding guidelines, the gutted pay equity legislation. But undoing these assaults will not undo the deep erosion of social programs that has occurred over the last decade, and the disproportionate impact this has had on women. Scraps do not add up to the density and coherence of interlocking policies and resource allocations that are needed to make a real and long-lasting difference.

The thing about love of country is that, to keep it alive, narrowing the gap between the land we live in and the land we imagine must be a real, in-our-lifetime possibility. “One day your time will come” does not cut it if you are a 16-year-old homeless girl in Vancouver. I and millions of other women have marshalled a lot of courage, faith and determination over the last four decades, but we have not narrowed the gap enough. Yes, we have made some important changes. Yes, we have taken steps forward. But we have also slid backwards. In 2009 in Canada, hundreds of Aboriginal women are missing and murdered, treated by violent men and by Canadian police forces, in the words of Bev Jacobs of the Native Women’s Association of Canada, “as though they were garbage.” Thirty-six percent of Aboriginal women, 29 percent of women of colour, 23 percent of immigrant women, 26 percent of women with disabilities and 38 percent of single mothers are living below the poverty line. Canada has one of the worst child care systems among developed nations. Our representation of women in elected positions is 46th in the world. And inequality is growing faster in Canada than in most OECD countries.

Some commentators, like Nicholas Kristof in the New York Times, now acknowledge that equality for women is the biggest global challenge and that equality, if achieved, could provide a solution to many of the world’s ills, including poverty and extremism. But facing into this world-sized challenge has to start at home. If politicians in Canada are not willing to invent a more equal sharing with women in terms of money, power and political leadership, why should they expect their counterparts in the developing world to do so?

What we are looking for is a fundamental shift, a new government that is fully committed to the equality of women. The National Women’s Liberal Caucus has made a solid start on a blueprint for a new social, economic and political agenda for women in its Pink Book Volume III (available at www.liberal.ca/pdf/docs/pinkbook_en.pdf) But the Pink Book is “recommendations to a new federal Liberal government” from the federally elected women in the party. We have not heard yet that this is your policy.

It’s time for you to speak. And act.

Shelagh Day is an author, activist and expert on women’s human rights who has worked with governments and non-governmental organizations on the interpretation and implementation of constitutional equality rights, anti-discrimination laws, and Canada’s international human rights obligations. She received a Governor General’s Persons Case Award in 2008 for her contributions to advancing the equality of women in Canada.