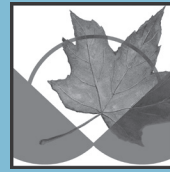


Election 2016 UNSPUN



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MANITOBA OFFICE

March 17, 2016

Who's Doing What About Poverty Reduction

For Manitobans concerned about poverty, there will be much to consider when sorting through political party platforms and promises in search of a meaningful poverty reduction plan. Poverty alleviation is a long-term proposition. No provincial political party can end poverty in the short term and certainly not in isolation of a federal government commitment. So beware of those politicians who offer silver bullets and quick fixes. Look to those who offer thoughtful honest responses that demonstrate an understanding that the circumstances for individuals living in poverty can be complicated and breaking the cycle of poverty requires multiple policy responses and a long-term commitment.

Poverty is often understood as not having enough financial resources to meet one's basic needs. This is of course true, but the solution is far more complex than simply increasing incomes. Money alone will not resolve poverty related issues such as addictions, trauma, or mental illness. Further, unless income benefits or wages are high enough for families to secure housing, childcare, and education, the opportunity to escape poverty through employment will be limited. So a public policy response to poverty must be comprehensive and multi-dimensional. It will require a plan of action leading to an increase in income, but also to increased access to housing, recreation,

decent jobs, childcare, education, healthcare etc. When assessing each political party's plan, we can look for actions it will take in these and other policy areas related to poverty and social exclusion.

Community groups working closely with people living in poverty have long advocated for a comprehensive plan to address poverty and eventually took it upon themselves to consult with Manitobans to develop their own plan. *The View From Here: Manitobans call for a poverty reduction plan* was released in 2009, the same year the government responded with its "All Aboard Strategy." In 2015 *The View From Here* was updated and endorsed by more than 100 community organizations across Manitoba.

The View From Here is important because it was developed and endorsed by experts in each of the policy areas it addresses: housing, income security, education, funding, food security, transportation, disability supports, health care and child welfare. The Commissioner of the inquiry into the death of Phoenix Sinclair agreed. Recognizing that poverty is a root cause of issues facing families caught up in the child welfare system, he called upon the Manitoba government to closely examine *The View From Here* "with a view to implementing the outstanding recommendations." The Manitoba government has since responded to several of the calls to

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action in *The View From Here* and community groups continue to measure government progress aligned with this comprehensive plan.

Comprehensive plans should include poverty reduction indicators with meaningful and realistic timelines and targets. Governments are often hesitant to do so because economic circumstances beyond government control can quickly derail the best of plans. Nonetheless, setting bold yet reasonable timelines and targets show that governments are serious about the issue. Multi-year timelines and targets make governments accountable and provide incentive to follow through with action.

Evaluation and Re-assessment is important. Poverty reduction plans should be forward looking, but this doesn't mean that governments shouldn't highlight what has been accomplished. In fact evaluation of progress is essential because it holds government accountable while also assessing what has worked and where improvements can be made.

Respect for community expertise and lived experience is essential. Government poverty reduction plans should include a process to consult with, engage, and respond to individuals living in poverty, community groups working with them and advocating on their behalf.

Determining progress on poverty depends on the low-income measures used and poverty indicators should be selected with caution. This matters in a province like Manitoba with a large First Nation population because the federal government has jurisdiction over poverty related matters on-reserve, and the Provincial government is responsible for off-reserve policy. Some measures include on-reserve data and others do not. It is important to include on-reserve data however when we do, we need to be clear about what level of government to hold accountable. Low-income measures also tell a story about one indicator alone, which is problematic

when measuring the effectiveness of a comprehensive plan.

We have indeed made progress in many areas including housing, childcare, and rental income for low-income households. But it is also true that there remain far too many individuals struggling to make ends meet and there is much more to do.

The View From Here provides a useful framework to assess what has been done and what still needs doing. It can help guide us in assessing the strength of each political party's plan. Do they endorse the policies put forward in *The View from Here*? Do they have an alternative comprehensive plan? If so, how does it compare with the *View from Here*? How do they intend to pay for their plan?

We can also examine where each party stands on how social services are delivered. For example, we know that low-income individuals and families are best served by publicly funded services that are either delivered by the public service or non-profit community organizations. Where do political parties stand on non-profit versus for-profit services such as housing, childcare and education? Where do they stand on the privatization of existing services?

The causes and solutions to poverty are complex and multi-dimensional. A government response to address poverty requires a carefully thought through comprehensive plan. Beware of one-off silver bullet campaign announcements and headline grabbers. We owe it to people living in poverty to invest some time reviewing *The View From Here* to make an informed decision on election day.

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UNSPUN is the 2016 provincial election commentary from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba

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