

In the throne speech of 2007 it was stated that the roots of crime must be addressed by battling against the growing gap between rich and poor. This has been a very difficult winter for the working poor, fixed income seniors, and those on income assistance, and CPP disability. As this group of Nova Scotians sought every means possible to heat their homes as heating oil went above \$1.00 a litre, it painted a grim picture of choices being made among buying food, heating their homes, or obtaining medications to keep them healthy.

The second Forum on Poverty held on Feb 15, 2007 addressed some of the practical problems around the gap separating rich and poor. An incomprehensible fact about our provinces is that over \$700 million a year is given to support Nova Scotians who are looking for a job- while there is a shortage of workers. In fact, the first Jamaicans arrive in the Valley this week and will resume their jobs at local farms as labourers. The Harvest Connect Program needs to encompass a wide range of seasonal and labour jobs beyond the harvest period. The situation described above is one we must quickly address for a number of reasons. In two weeks time when the budget documents are passed out during the spring session of the NS Legislature, the reason we cannot continue to spend millions of dollars on people not working is made startlingly clear; interest on the provincial debt will be the third line item at around \$900 million dollars.

Training at centres like PEOPLE WORX here in the Annapolis Valley where skills and literacy are emphasized must become a requirement for those who do not have basic qualifications. We are now on the eve of a workforce that will only need 10% of its makeup with less than a Grade 12 education. Some of our large businesses are making their own investment in training by having the Community College provide customized training for people who are lacking in education and therefore are unemployed.

Across Nova Scotia there are only sporadic transportation systems in rural areas and this presents a monumental problem for many who want to improve their chances of employability. I would contend that improving skills and literacy, while increasing rural transportation, may be two of the basic methods bridging the gap between the high rate of unemployment in some parts of the province and the labour shortage.

The Forum on Poverty , Part 2 heard from several speakers who identified quality child care for parents, who are in the working poor status as a significant step in lifting them out of poverty. Presently, the Annapolis Valley is identified as having the greatest need for subsidized housing and this is seen as complicating the poverty issue. In this troubling issue analysis, out -migration cannot be overlooked as 13 out of 18 counties based on 2006 Stats Canada are losing population. The out- migration has led to lost infrastructure such as schools, public services, post offices, gas stations and banks. The loss of a tax base has led to many municipalities having a tough time providing services with de-population, rural communities have an older population, less educated, higher levels of disabilities, and more health requirements. While this is not a recent trend only, the rate of rural decline in some areas must be a legislative issue this spring.

In the fall sitting of the NS Legislature, minority government worked very well together to pass a Liberal Bill that requires the creation of a poverty reduction strategy. This development in Newfoundland, three or four years ago has led to a number of positive developments. From Feed Nova Scotia to an organization called The Face of Poverty Consultation, these grassroots organizations will bring forth an action plan that will be common sense based and practical. It is now clear that government is being pushed to bring marginalized groups into the workforce.

There are some government departments that are recognizing the need to promote literacy as a way to increase productivity and are asking that it be a more inclusive part of policy. Also, the Nunn Commission of Inquiry has forced Community Services to deliver a more holistic approach to its youth services and supports with basic needs of education, mental health and physical well being addressed. As government agencies implement new approaches rather than just passing out the \$700 million I referred to earlier, business is becoming increasingly frustrated by the

illiteracy barrier. The history of business impacting on social reform is strong in this province, so maybe the pressures of the labour market can achieve some immediate, but more importantly long-lasting reforms. The starting point is an all out campaign against illiteracy as the 21st century workforce demands high levels of competency.

In January, at the Legislative committee for economic development it was stated by Pat Ryan, the deputy head of NS Business Inc., that the province has a serious literacy problem. An organization like Feed My Lambs has raised awareness that all citizens need to be engaged in helping people out of poverty. They made an impact in this politician, because as we lift the poor we have better communities, better health and improved business.