

LIBERAL BIENNIAL CONVENTION 2012 POLICY SESSION REPORT

Name of session: Advancing Equality, Diversity, and Social Cohesion

Moderator: Greg Fergus

Caucus Reps: Rodger Cuzner M.P. and Carolyn Bennett M.P.

Panelists:

- Dr. Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux, Assistant Professor, University of Toronto School of Social Work, Adjunct Assistant Professor at Carlton University and Advisory Member of the Mental Health Commission of Canada
- Peggy Taillon, President and CEO, Canadian Council on Social Development

Rapporteur: Senator Claudette Tardif

NPEP REP: Scott Wheildon

Approximate number of delegates/observers in attendance: 100

Key points raised by panelists:

Dr. Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux: We have more than enough evidence that we need to change the way we engage the Native community. Yet, what we have been doing is not working.

Aboriginal issues are not going away. There must be a sustained, ongoing commitment to work in partnership with Aboriginal communities to get solutions. Aboriginal communities represent a goldmine potential participation - as much as 400 billion in one generation.

Peggy Taillon: Inequality is the new global pandemic. Canada's proud history as a just society has essentially disappeared. Prosperity and opportunity will soon be out of reach for our eroding middle class. Economic structures are not meeting our needs. Rising health care costs and pressure on an eroding social

infrastructure are major challenges. We need to revisit and renew our social contract. It's time for a national conversation about who we are today, where we want to go and how we will get there.

Key points raised by NPEP rep: Scott Wheildon, described submission to the national platform committee discussed in the online forum prior to convention. He indicated that there is broad support among members who commented on the website for social justice matters. Resolutions focused on access to post-secondary education, a national anti-poverty strategy, early-childhood learning, etc; broad support in online community, pay equity, and people with disabilities.

Highlights of Q and A session:

- Early Childhood investments, especially in rural and remote areas : we need to have a national strategy that uses national standards and hard data to direct proper resources. Investments in early-childhood programs have shown lead to better lives, and ultimately less costs to the public purse.
- Building bridges with our Aboriginal communities: Look to the example of New Zealand, and support Paul Martin's initiative.
- Access to Community Centres: Federal funding should be decided in consultation and with direction from local municipalities.
- Proper funding for poverty reduction: We need a national food strategy. We need to work with CHMC who have the statistics and maps of where the needs are, and we should target funding where there is the greatest need. The National Council of Welfare has a very good report on impacts of lack of affordable housing.
- Mental health and public education: The mental health commission is not doing enough and we should demand better.
- The unique challenges of Aboriginal women, where, due to lack of support, criminal organizations can offer more for them than their government: We need to work hard.
- Aboriginal who when to school in Ottawa - no aboriginal content in the curriculum.

Notable proposals, ideas, suggestions (research to be undertaken, outreach or seminars, roundtables or conferences to be organized, or ideas for caucus interventions in Parliament):

- We should engage in positive outreach in our own communities and ridings with the aboriginal community to build relationships with them, share histories and knowledge.

Positive/negative feedback from audience and general mood in the session:

- The general mood was somber and reflective. There was frustration that the problems are so clear, but the solutions so opaque and not a priority for the government of Canada.

Conclusion (consensual objectives for the next 24-months, key elements of a work plan to guide us to the 2014 Policy Biennial):

- We need to keep socially disadvantaged people top of mind. We need to look at all policies through a social lens.
 - **Too many Canadians are pushed to the margins of our economic life** – Aboriginal peoples, those suffering from mental illnesses, Canadians with disabilities and others living in poverty.
 - Our country is at a crossroads, changing in fundamental ways. It's time to renew our social contract; we **need to fix it, not just tweak some of our structures**. Government responses have been woefully inadequate and we need to do things differently.
 - **The need to work on inclusion**: encourage community development and the building of sustainable communities through viable partnerships, the need to share resources with all communities. Doing things better by engaging/including those who deal with the issues. To empower with solidarity requires ongoing commitment.
 - **Poverty and income inequality** is a reality in our society. We have become a have/have not society. This is a threat to the social fabric of our society. For us as Liberals this is an issue of social justice. We **need** an antipoverty strategy.
 - **Obligations of government**: fairness of opportunity for all Canadians; the need to work on inclusion; a shared leadership (working together); the need to share and modify our understandings of various groups and their issues.