

RSAC – MEETING WITH MINISTER OF FINANCE

On Thursday 28 February representatives of the Religious Social Action Coalition met with the Honourable Tom Osborne, Minister of Finance, and a member of his staff to discuss poverty related issues and the forthcoming Provincial Budget. Representing the RSAC were the Very Rev Dr Marion Pardy, Mr Rami Wadhwa, Dr Veeresh Gadag, Dr Steve Wolinetz, Major Steve Barrett and Mr George Powell.

The RSAC recognizes the demands placed on Government, and the financial position of our Province. However it is necessary to address the widening gap between rich and poor.

The Minimum Wage continues to be a matter of concern. A household having two persons working full time at minimum wage is well below the poverty line. The intent of the Government to have our minimum wage “at parity” with the Atlantic Provinces and the rest of Canada will still leave recipients well below the poverty line. It is important that additional funds reach those most in need – those at the lower end of the socio-economic scale.

In addition to having the Minimum Wage tied to the Consumer Price Index, other social benefits should also be indexed. In recent years social benefits have fallen behind.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy is a multi-department program that was initially the envy of other provinces. However it appears to be lacking in intentional measurements with regard to the effectiveness of its programs. It is essential that this continue to be a Government priority. We cannot afford to wait until the financial condition of the Province improves. Poverty reduction must continue to be a priority and the funds available must be used wisely.

The RSAC continues to advocate for “Fairness for all” (**Fairness Impact Study**). This includes advocating for a **Living Wage** and an examination of Government policies and programs to ensure that those at the lower end of the socio-economic scale are treated fairly.

We encourage the Government to

- Initiate multi-year grants so organizations can make long term plans.
- Initiate a Task Group to address the issue of poverty.
- Provide additional support to programs that work
- Initiate action on observations and recommendations of the Independent Tax Review Committee that could assist those in need.