

## Pressing the anti-poverty pledge



The Religious Social Action Coalition launched a campaign and website Monday in St. John's asking all political parties to pledge to fight poverty as part of their election platforms. Members of the coalition include Anglican, Roman Catholic,...

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### Religious coalition re-launches election website

Topics :

~~Religious Social Action Coalition~~ , ~~NDP~~ , ~~Catholic Church~~ , ~~Goulds~~

The Religious Social Action Coalition is asking all candidates running in the May 2 federal election to pledge to end poverty.

The group — made up of many of this province's religious leaders, including Christians, Hindus, Jews and Muslims — re-launched a website Monday which tracks which candidates have signed the coalition's pledge to end poverty.

It will be updated throughout the campaign, as candidates in all ridings across the country respond to the pledge request.

A number of candidates from the St. John's area attended the event, including Conservative Loyola Sullivan, Liberals Scott Andrews and Siobhan Coady and the NDP's Ryan Cleary, Matt Fuchs and Jack Harris.

"Poverty in a rich country like ours is a failure of the community," said Veeresh Gadag, past chairman of the Hindu Temple in St. John's and a director of the coalition.

Another director, Rev. Paul Lundrigan of St. Kevin's Catholic Church in Goulds, said after the Second World War all political parties worked to address issues of poverty for about 20 years. But in the last 40 years, the issue has largely been ignored on the political agenda.

"We see too many things happening to allow the wealthy to become even richer and the poor to become poorer," said Lundrigan.

"We still see more and more people lining up at our food banks. We see our senior citizens going to malls and shopping centres to keep warm because they don't want to spend the money to heat their homes because they can't afford the drugs that they need."

Arnold Bennett of the Jewish community Havura said the "questions that needed to be asked, were not asked and are still not being asked."

"Poverty in a rich country like ours is a failure of the community." - Veeresh Gadag

He called on reporters and voters to ask these questions of politicians for each and every government policy announced: who benefits and who pays — the rich, the middle class or the poor, and if the policy will help close the poverty gap or make it even wider.

After outlining what was on the coalition's website, the directors present took questions from reporters.

Bennett was asked if the coalition has seen any advances in poverty reduction since it asked all candidates to take the same pledge during the 2008 election.

"No," he said. "Poverty has continued to get worse. We see it on the front lines in the food banks ... and the growing gap between the enormous and expensive houses that are being built here and the longer lines of middle class and poor folks who can't afford to buy any of them."

But Bennett said, last time the coalition attempted to get answers from all candidates itself and this time it has partnered with other religious groups across the country to ask candidates in their areas to also take the pledge.

However, Bennett suggested it might take more than pledges to get politicians to act.

"We think (poverty) will continue to get worse until Canadians demand the answer to the question. When you give us a campaign promise, tell us not just that somebody will benefit but whether that someone is going to be rich, middle income or poor," he said.

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**PETER II**

- April 5, 2011 at 16:44:04

Talking about rich and poor in a religious context is ambiguous. Who has the poorer spirit, Job or his comforters? Using this context to press for political change is even worse. For example, poverty now usually means cash-flow poor, not debt/equity status. Canada/USA is only rich running huge deficits. The same is true of many families. Some of the wealthy in society are merely those that are composed of two professionals with only two children, as opposed to the 1960's when many households had a single bread winner with five children. It is the legitimate windfall of yuppie baby boomers. Is it right to tax back their good luck? Some, on fixed income with own their own home, don't pay any income tax but are taxed through the backdoor via municipal taxes even though they use minimal services. Fed/Prov. government look merciful, cities and towns look mean!! Bureaucracies follow the gospel with their charity in that "...But when [they] doest alms, [they] let not [their] left hand know what [their] right hand doeth..." There is a big difference for a student living home earning minimum wage and a single parent earning the same. There is often no allowance for travel time, work materials and equipment,

extra food allowance for hard labour. Thoughtful employers allow the employees to stretch out the work over longer hours. this, however, destroys work ethic and, in effect, the harder one works, the less they get paid. The English word fair, sometimes only means mediocre. Justice is in greater demand. No one can have too much mercy? But inadvertently reintroducing [rich/poor] class into NL society helps no one.

**PETER**

**- April 5, 2011 at 15:52:06**

It's about time the country woke up to the poverty issue. I have been volunteering at a food bank for 15 years, and all I see is a steady increase in clientele, no let up at all. Every time our economy take off, so does prices and people who work for low wages and hours, seniors on fixed incomes and on social services get left behind. I'm sick of seeing people having to decide on whether to buy food, heat or medications, it isn't right in such a wealthy country. These people do the best they can with what they have, and food banks are only a temporary solution to a long term problem. It's actually getting harder for food banks to even operate with the steady increase in clients and a decrease in donations, and a government that doesn't recognize the poverty in the country.

**HERB MORRISON**

**- April 5, 2011 at 15:47:50**

Because I am a person who lives in poverty, I read the article pertaining to the efforts of the Religious Social Action Coalition with more than passing interest. I would suggest that this organization suffers from the same malady as other organizations, which take it upon themselves to advocate for the rights of those of us who live in poverty. While I applaud the desire of such groups as the Religious Social Action Coalition to advocate on behalf of the impoverished, I would suggest the this desire to aid the impoverished, be tempered with some semblance of respect for the dignity of impoverished. To be frank, I find the approach taken by anti-poverty groups in general, to be, at least in some ways, insulting at best, degrading and dehumanizing at it's worse. For example, the fact that people associated with the Religious Social Action Coalition. And other anti-poverty groups as well, are the only ones within these organizations speaking for the impoverished, leaves the impression that all persons who live in poverty are, in fact, incapable of speaking for themselves. Having earned an undergraduate degree, as well as diplomas and certificates at both the graduate and undergraduate levels, I am quite capable of representing my own interests, thank you very much. If anti-poverty groups were open to allowing those of us who know firsthand what it is like to live in poverty, to have a voice within their organization, whereby we could indeed speak on behalf of ourselves, and others who live in poverty this could be effective in promoting the interests of the impoverished. I genuinely feel that anti-poverty groups such as the Religious Social Action Coalition might be as interested in polishing up their collective halos as they are in advocating for the impoverished. How can Governments be expected to treat those of us with appropriate dignity and respect if anti-poverty advocacy groups including the Religious Social Action Coalition fail to do so?