

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)
SPEECH

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MINISTER
ALBERTA HUMAN SERVICES

EDMONTON GLENORA ROTARY CLUB

NOVEMBER 15, 2012
7:15 A.M. – 8:30 A.M.

GLENORA CLUB
RIVER VALLEY ROAD NW AND FORTWAY DRIVE NW
EDMONTON, AB

INTRODUCTION

It's a pleasure to be here with you.

Together, you personify the Rotarian creed of *Service above Self*.

Your work is very important to the continued vitality and well-being of our community.

Your signature project, the Intercultural Day Care, is a perfect illustration of that.

Access to quality, affordable child care is essential for parents.

This is especially true for new Canadians. Their challenge is to balance the responsibility of caring for their children, finding a job to support their family and adjusting to a new country and culture.

Because of your support – dozens of immigrants and refugees feel welcomed into our community.

You are helping them make important connections and put down roots.

Because of that, they have hope for a brighter future and a better life - for themselves and their families.

My ministry, Alberta Human Services, shares many of the same goals with you.

We work closely with communities to provide a wide range of supports and services for Albertans.

These include everything from worker safety and employment standards – support and services for children – assistance for people facing physical and intellectual challenges – and help for people escaping an abusive relationship.

I think we can all agree that Alberta's future is bright.

However, we face a number of social challenges that threaten to hold us back.

Poverty, addiction, crime and an aging population are just some of those social challenges.

We also have an over-representation of Aboriginal people in our child intervention and justice systems that must be effectively addressed, if Alberta is to reach its full potential.

So what can we do to address these issues?

One approach would be to hide in gated communities and jail all the bad guys.

Though I think bad guys should go to jail, I don't think that people with social problems for which there is a community solution should go to jail.

Nor should they be ostracized from our communities.

Incarceration of people with social issues cannot become one of Alberta's growth industries.

Lock-em-all-up simply doesn't work.

If there is an aggressive panhandler outside your business, he is likely to drive away your customers.

**So, you call the police and have him removed.
What does that achieve?**

He may have psychological problems.

He may be homeless.

He may have untreated Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

Incarceration is expensive and does not address the underlying issues that put him at your door in the first place.

As a result, that person is likely to be back a few days later.

Police Chief Knecht says that his officers can deal with the kind of person I just described as many as 150 times a year. Until we effectively address the underlying issues, we will be trapped in an endless and expensive loop.

When people do not feel connected to or supported by their community, it can create bad outcomes like crime, addictions and poverty.

It can also affect our economy.

Attracting and retaining workers is an ongoing challenge for employers.

Low taxes and high salaries can help attract workers – but often they aren't enough.

It is far easier to attract people when they perceive the community as having a good education system, a healthy environment and a great quality of life.

Imagine that you have just moved to Edmonton and are settling into your new job.

However, an examination by your one-year-old's doctor indicates that she may have Autism.

What will you do if you find out that the services your child needs aren't available in Edmonton?

Will you stay here and hope everything works out?

Or will you start looking for a job in a place where you can access the services your child needs?

A heavy equipment operator who can't find needed social services won't be fully productive and may be distracted to the point where he/she is a danger to himself/herself and others.

A single parent who can't find day care is not going to be focussed on their work.

In contrast, when people get the support they need, everyone benefits.

Individuals and families have a higher quality of life. Our communities become safer and healthier...

And our economy grows stronger.

Government, non-profits, communities and businesses all share a common goal:

We want every Albertan to have the opportunity to live in dignity and participate fully in our economy, communities and cultural life.

Together, we've invested billions in developing and delivering social programs.

Thousands of Albertans dedicate their lives to serving their communities and making a difference for others.

We have the will, the resources and the expertise to address social challenges and create meaningful, positive change in our communities.

However, there is still a missing piece.

We need a framework to create a common sense of purpose, strengthen partnerships and provide a clear indication of who should be doing what.

We need a guide to help all of us make the right social policy decisions and take the right actions – in a more collaborative way – to achieve the results that Albertans want.

What I want for the elements of that framework is similar to the 4-way test.

Is it true?

Is it fair to all concerned?

Will it build goodwill and better friendships?

Will it be beneficial to all concerned? (Pause)

In June, we launched a public consultation to help create the province's first ever social policy framework.

A number of rotary clubs held community discussions and participated in the engagement.

Albertans answered three key questions:

- 1. What kind of Alberta do we want to live in?**
- 2. How can all of us –work together to achieve that Alberta? and**
- 3. Who is responsible for doing what?**

By outlining a vision for our province and identifying outcomes, strategies, roles and responsibilities – Albertans are helping create a framework that will determine the future direction of Alberta's social services.

It will enable communities to determine if the supports and services they provide are producing the outcomes they need and want so that Albertans get the right services at the right time and in the right place – from the right people.

Government can be a partner in that process. It cannot and should not be the driver. (Pause)

It's been 30 years since we, as a province, asked ourselves what our responsibilities to each other are.

What we do today in the area of social services must accurately reflect today's realities.

I encourage you to visit socialpolicy.alberta.ca to look at the results of the public engagement.

See what more than 25,000 Albertans have said.

And stay tuned for the release of the finalized social policy framework – in the near future.

I trust that it will be another useful tool in guiding your rotary club's decisions – as it will for other organizations and communities across Alberta. (Pause)

Communities are much more than a collection of businesses and homes.

They are about shared values.

Communities exist because people recognize that a community can do collectively what no one group or individual can do alone.

They are safe and healthy when engaged citizens work together.

You did not shape the province you were born into.

But, by putting service above self, you are shaping the one your children and grandchildren are born into.

Together, we will create communities where every Albertan has the opportunity to succeed and the ability to live with dignity and respect.

Thank You.