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EDITORIAL: Poverty reduction not political fodder

By Victoria News

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Poverty reduction isn't a hard cause to get behind, and our local gang of federal and provincial representatives did just that earlier this week.

On Tuesday, the Community Social Planning Council, a non-profit with a 78 year history of social advocacy in Victoria, announced the region's 10 MPs and MLAs endorsed its Community Action Plan on Poverty.

The plan outlines a series of initiatives to help improve the lot of many Greater Victoria residents and parents who struggle with low pay and a high cost of living.

It doesn't offer "silver bullets" to solve poverty, as noted by Esquimalt-Juan de Fuca MP Randall Garrison, but it recognizes that policy changes large and small, and contributions from community organizations and individuals can make big differences in people's lives.

To their credit, representatives from the federal and provincial NDP and Green parties kept the usual vitriol against the ruling parties to a minimum. They offered reasonable suggestions on taxation reform, regulating predatory lending companies, and spoke about the expense of homelessness and poverty in terms of policing, health care, the courts and social welfare.

Despite being touted as a non-partisan effort, the press conference was meant to put pressure on the ruling parties in B.C. and Ottawa. Missing from Tuesday's event of course were MLAs and MPs from the B.C. Liberals and federal Conservatives, respectively. An unfortunate by-product of Greater Victoria not having elected officials in government is that opposition members are forced to find the ear of their political foes.

Good ideas and worthy initiatives should transcend party politics, but they don't. Come election time, all parties, NDP and Greens included, crow about when the party in power adopts (or steals) their ideas.

But amid the usual mudslinging of provincial politics, there is hope for poverty initiatives.

The Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services, the committee which listens to citizens across the province to gauge budget priorities, and has members from the Liberals and the NDP, recommended funding a provincewide poverty reduction plan. It's a non-partisan start.

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