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Tackling poverty countrywide

Senator Eggleton tells Hamilton breakfast meeting how it can be done

CARMELA FRAGOMENI

The Hamilton Spectator

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Poverty is costing Canada billions of dollars and crippling its future, says Senator Art Eggleton, chair of a committee that spent two years studying the problem.

Eggleton told a Hamilton anti-poverty breakfast meeting yesterday that most people don't realize the huge economic cost of poverty nationally -- \$7.5 billion in health care costs and \$8 to \$13 billion in lost productivity each year. It is also increasing tax bills, depressing the economy, increasing health care bills and breeding alienation and crime, he added.

"We simply can't afford poverty any more."

Eggleton cited a recent study putting the entire bill at \$30 billion yearly, more than half of the federal deficit, he said. "Imagine what eliminating poverty would mean to our fiscal situation, to our ability to pay for education and innovation, and health care; to our capacity to care for the elderly."

The Senate committee's mammoth 290-page report: *In From the Margins: A Call to Action on Poverty, Housing and Homelessness*, has 74 recommendations. But Eggleton said the most crucial solution to poverty is to first engage the federal government, creating the political will to take action. Much also depends on the voting public. During elections, polls don't list poverty as an issue people are worried about, he said.

It's time to deal with poverty on an economic level, not just a moral one, he said. He is urging people to push their MPs and the federal government to develop a national strategy on poverty.

"A lot depends on what support the public shows," he told *The Spectator* editorial board later in the day. "It'll make quite a difference."

Dealing with poverty effectively doesn't mean throwing more money at it, he added.

"We spend a lot of money and don't get the results we should. We don't need to spend more money, we need to spend smarter, more efficiently and effectively."

"The fact is that it is more expensive for us to leave someone on the street than to provide them with decent housing and support services."

Eggleton talked of opportunities to fill future labour shortages with older workers, the disabled, new immigrants, aboriginals and single parents -- all of whom are most vulnerable to poverty.

Eggleton was invited to Hamilton by the 25 in 5 Hamilton Network for Poverty Reduction, whose goal is to reduce poverty by 25 per cent in five years.

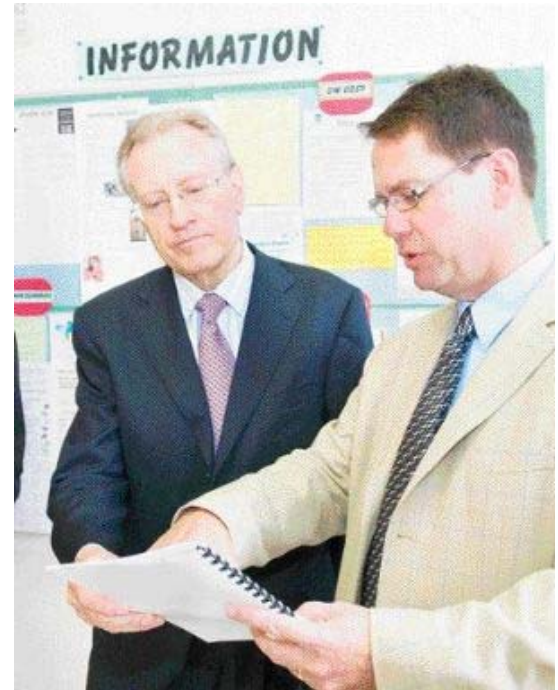
He spent the day here visiting several agencies including the Good Shepherd Centre and the Housing Help Centre. He said he is impressed with the multi-sector Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction as a community-based solution.

"It's one of the ones we cite (in the report) as one of the best practices," he said. "We've seen a few others, but not many with this level of commitment."

See: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/40/2/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/citi-e/subsite-dec09-e/reports-e.htm> or <http://senatorarteggleton.ca/Resources/Documents.aspx> for more information.

cfragomeni@thespec.com

905-526-3392



Kaz Novak, the Hamilton Spectator

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