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## Senator pushes N.B. to adopt guaranteed income for the poor

**Poverty Sen. Hugh Segal says province should follow Ontario's lead in solving major social issue**

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SAINT JOHN - Ending poverty is not only good for the community, but also for business.

That's the message Sen. Hugh Segal delivered on a trip to Saint John for the annual Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative (BCAPI) luncheon on Thursday.

The senator for Kingston-Frontenac-Leeds has travelled across the country speaking about why it's important to eradicate poverty. He's worked on two senate committee reports about poverty, called Beyond Freefall: Halting Rural Poverty (2008) and In From the Margins: A Call to Action on Poverty, Housing and Homelessness (2009).

In his speech Thursday in front of Saint John's top business and anti-poverty leaders, Segal praised the city for its work in battling poverty.

"I don't think there is another Canadian city where there is this kind of business leadership on poverty," he said.

He cited the Promise Partnership, where children at Hazen White-St. Francis School in the north end are mentored by University of New Brunswick Saint John, as well as PALS and the Early Learning Centre as examples of this leadership.

"Saint John has become a compelling leader in addressing the pathologies that the poor often inherit or are visited upon them, producing serious and negative life outcomes that burden them and all of society," Segal said.

Throughout his speech, he made the business case for a New Brunswick guaranteed annual income system, where government tops up incomes to make sure everyone living in poverty is making enough money to survive.

Segal argued it has worked in Ontario, where a guaranteed annual income system for seniors dramatically cut the senior poverty rate two years after it was introduced, down to less than three per cent from more than 30 per cent.

"On the revenue or reduced expenditure side, you would see the end of provincial welfare, less demand of our prisons, policing and judicial systems and less demand for our health care system - all moderating provincial and federal taxing requirements," Segal said.

"And as poverty declines, and better health, family and educational outcomes would ensue, we would have a more productive and economically robust economy in many ways." A guaranteed annual income would cut the number of social assistance recipients. The system would work better than current social programs, which Segal described as "piecemeal programs that do not connect to each other in any way." In his mind, the programs stem from an old Victorian-era idea that "poor people are less deserving and incapable of managing their own lives," so others must decide how to spend their money. Buying a Christmas basket for a family with pre-selected items instead of handing over money is one example he used.

Not trusting the poor, he said, is the worst kind of discrimination: that of low expectations.

He argued a guaranteed annual income would eliminate the bureaucracy and cost involved in doling out social

assistance payments. In Ontario, for example, Segal said caseworkers must navigate some 800 rules, asking "intrusive, embarrassing and demeaning questions." He suspects the result would be healthier people and a healthier economy, with lower business tax rates across the country thanks to less government dollars spent on the effects of poverty.

"It would be a mark of civility and humanity. It would be Canadian leadership that could move the world, and above all, change the lives of millions of Canadians: our fellow citizens, our neighbours and all members of the Canadian family,"he said.

"We can also affirm that we will not tolerate entire generations with their nose pressed to the window of a society they cannot afford to join."