

All Aboard, Indeed

It's New Years Day 2012 - a good time for reflecting backwards, and looking forward. Thank goodness for a warm fire to kindle the thought processes.

Two recent newspaper references caused me to think back on the words of my friend Leonard Alexee, an aboriginal elder from the Nisga'a territories married into the Tsimshian nation. Leonard, a retired CN employee and former school trustee, spoke of "The Tsimshian Canoe": If we're all in the same canoe we had better be paddling together and in the same direction if we want to get anywhere.

Metaphors for social conduct and relationship are important. The Brits would often talk of "all being in the same boat". And recently Michael Ignatieff referenced his Russian father's social metaphor about the 1930's Depression: "When I asked him what it was like in the Dirty Thirties, he said that if you had a job it was okay: in fact it was like being in the heated parlour car in the front of the train, while the unemployed were in the unheated freight cars in the back. The same is true today." (*All Aboard*-Globe Dec 31, 2011) Again, a metaphor of travel through life being connected with implied inequities.

Ignatieff went on to make clear that the equity he sought was not one size fitting all: "The message the young people in Occupy Wall Street want us to hear is that societies that cannot face a crisis together are sick. Societies that cannot fix their injustices will eventually break down." Ignatieff argues that the existence of a "1%" is not the issue, and is not a problem. The problem comes when there is not sufficient shelter or nutrition for some of the '99%' - that is not what we see as a fair society. Therefore, when that occurs, the 'many' need to act to ensure opportunity for those lacking food, shelter, and basic participation in society.

Whether we are all in the same Tsimshian canoe, on the same train, or in the same boat, unfair inequity will in time lead to a degradation of the collective journey.

Ignatieff looked to our elected representatives to ensure that we keep things afloat, not just this year but in the long term Canadian way our polls tell us we value. "Government regulators must be there to protect people from predatory profit-taking that puts the rest of us at risk. Regulating...will do more than reform the boardrooms. It will rebuild a good society's most important asset—the sense that our system is fair."

Social services are an important part of our societal approach to achieving that fairness: supporting those less able to paddle, putting some heat and food into the rear cars - to improve the journey and the destination. **Board Voice** is purely a part of the maintenance and repair process for those craft.

In British Columbia our politicians seem to understand this, in their own way. However, all parties are (rightfully) at the mercy of the voters, and exist at the will of the citizens. The question for me is: are **we** as a society ready to let our elected reps make the best decisions, and are we ready to participate in a public social dialogue about what makes those policy decisions "right" and acceptable to us?

The Vancouver Sun recently declared: "So at the top of our wish list for the next year is the wish that all elected officials, and all political parties, commit to a program of evidence-based policy. This means that regardless of their political ideology, they should propose and implement policies that, according to the

evidence, will actually reduce crime or homelessness or...whatever the policies are ostensibly aimed at.” (The Newspaper’s View-Dec 28, 2011) **Board Voice** says “right on”. Let’s make the Social Determinants of Health, and other seminal evidence-based work, an important foundation for social dialogue and collective action to prevent the loss of passengers, the sinking of the canoe, the train wreck---you choose the metaphor, and then support the hard lifting that will follow. **Board Voice** says “count us in.”

One way to become involved in this process is to link up with other concerned board members and executive directors to engage in discussions about what’s going on in your community and how, through collaboration you can effect change. This process is already occurring in a number of communities across the province. With an election looming in 17 months, now is the time to ensure that social services become a part of the election conversation and are not overshadowed by health and education concerns. Investing in community social services makes good economic sense.

If you are interested, please reach out to Regional Leads listed below. They will be able to assist you in linking up with others or organizing in your community. Board Voice is an organization owned and operated by board members: You. Please feel free to join the conversation.

Best wishes for 2012,

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