

Candidates tangle over poverty issues [CA-BC] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A question about women and poverty brought some revealing responses from Vancouver Island North candidates in their first CRTV forum, including discussions of child care, pay equity, training and corporate welfare.

The candidates were asked:

With one child in six and one woman in seven living below the poverty line in Canada, what will your party do to reduce the systematic causes of poverty that disproportionately affect women and children? And what will you do as our Member of Parliament for the poor and homeless in Campbell River and North Island?

Conservative Party candidate John Duncan took the conversation to child care.

"The first thing that comes to mind is we do not want to discriminate against anyone with young children by putting together a child care package that only applies to people who wish to take advantage of non-existent child care spaces.

"Our proposal, which would provide \$1,200 per child under six years old per parental unit whether it's a single mother or a couple, is a very positive measure that would help in terms of all of that.

Liberal Party candidate Jim Mitchell objected.

"John, \$100 a month for child care does nothing to provide one more quality child care space," he said. "It does not provide one more quality child care space. It does not provide a minimum standard of care for these children. If we want to deal with child poverty - created by a situation where women who are unable to get training because they have to stay in a job that pays low - we have to first find a good place with a good standard of quality care for these children where the women feel secure enough to leave their children and go and pursue training."

Duncan said the Conservatives would be spending \$10 billion over five years on their program, which is twice what the Liberals are planning to spend.

"Ten provincial bureaucracies are going to eat it up (the Liberal's plan) and they're going to provide very few quality day care spaces," he said. "You think that a few spaces created by the nanny state are the way to go. We're saying no. The people who are at the poverty end of the scale are the least likely to use those spaces."

Mitchell responded. "We plan to set a standard for child care workers and the quality of care which children get when they are in that phase of their life under six years old," he said.

New Democratic Party candidate Catherine Bell brought the discussion back to the original question.

"I want to talk about women in poverty," she said. "Can we talk about that for a minute?"

"It's a question of value, how women are valued in this society. Women earn 70 (cents) for every dollar that men earn. What does that tell you about how women are valued in this society?"

Mitchell attempted to paint the disparity in its best light, saying great gains had been made over the last 25 years.

"Oh great," Bell said sarcastically. "We're up to 70 cents. We need a pay equity program which the Liberals would not agree to."

Mitchell veered into dangerous territory. "The way you get pay equity is by having an equal skill level," he told Bell, "so the work of the same value is paid the same dollar."

Bell said it wasn't about training levels.

"They are working in the same jobs as men doing the exact same work, and they're still paid less," she said. "Women and their children are living in poverty because we don't have pay equity and we don't have a national child care program. I know that a national child care program has been promised over and over and over again and never delivered on."

"It wasn't until more NDP MPs got into Ottawa and pushed the Liberals to make sure that they started implementing money for child care to the provinces."

Mitchell returned fire. "I think you aggrandize the impact of the NDP in the House just a little bit too much," he said.

Green Party candidate Michael Mascall was invited to take part in the discussion.

"The Green approach to this is a little different. We would like to see a guaranteed minimum income so that a woman would have \$10,000 a year and that would take the pressure off her to have to go and work at these low wages that Catherine pointed out. And she could be a full-time mother for her children, which is really the best way for providing values and creating a sound place for children to grow up."

- reprinted from Courier-Islander

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