



Island MPs Need to Work Together for a Basic Income Guarantee

Nothing is as powerful as an idea whose time has come, and a basic income guarantee's time has come.

A basic income guarantee is a simple policy that is popular across the political spectrum. Libertarians and conservatives like the idea because it would be straightforward to administer, meaning less bureaucracy and opening the door for smaller government. On the left, the idea is popular as a solution to poverty that could make a real change in the lives of low income families.

A basic income guarantee works like this: we agree on an amount of income that lets people meet their basic needs and live with dignity, regardless of work status. For example, if we agree on a basic income of guarantee of \$20,000 per year and an Islander makes only \$16,000, he or she would receive \$4,000 to make up the difference. This policy would represent a big step forward, replacing our current, labyrinthine system of welfare support.

Historically, the idea of a basic income guarantee has been championed by leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. to Richard Nixon. It was successfully piloted in Manitoba during the 1970s; more recently, there have been successful pilots in Namibia, Finland, India, and the Netherlands.

In Canada, momentum is building. Just last month, the Canadian Medical Association passed a motion in support of basic income at their annual general meeting, recognizing that poverty is a significant, preventable cause of illness.

During our recent provincial election campaign, the leaders of P.E.I.'s four major parties said they would commit to exploring a basic income guarantee program. Charlottetown mayor Clifford Lee has also gone on record saying he supports the idea, joining the mayors of Edmonton, Calgary and ten Ontario municipalities.

However, despite support from healthcare professionals, provincial leaders, and municipal leaders, the key missing piece of the puzzle is federal leadership.

The Green Party of Canada has led on this issue, promising a Guaranteed Livable Income in order to fight poverty. Charlottetown Green Party candidate Becka Viau is an active volunteer with the Campaign for a Basic Income Guarantee and has made basic income central to her campaign. The three other PEI candidates running for the Green Party — Lynne Lund (Malpeque), Nils Ling (Egmont), and Teresa Doyle (Cardigan) — endorse basic income as part of their party platform. When asked about basic income guarantee in the context of food security, NDP candidate Billy Cann (Cardigan) also committed support for working

towards PEI-based pilot projects if the NDP forms government. Charlottetown Liberal candidate Sean Casey's office has been involved in the C-BIG movement, too. We need MPs from all parties to working across party lines to join this effort.

The argument against basic income guarantee is that people wouldn't want to work if they could meet their basic needs. *The Economist* magazine wrote, "Loafers could live comfortably without lifting a finger." But it's simply a bigoted stereotype to say people living in poverty are lazy. The only thing that isn't working is our current inertia on fighting inequality, as the divide between the rich and poor in Canada grows rapidly wider.

A basic income guarantee is a common sense policy that will help build resilient Island communities. Now, we just need Island MPs who will show real leadership by putting their voice behind this long overdue poverty solution.

— Christian Ledwell, C-BIG volunteer



Three PEI federal candidates who have talked basic income: Becka Viau, Green Party, Charlottetown; Billy Cann, NDP, Cardigan; and Sean Casey, Liberal Party, Charlottetown.

C-BIG
CAMPAIGN FOR A BASIC INCOME
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