



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

there is an alternative.

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Hope for a New Year: four actions in 2014

A new year brings hope and the possibility for a healthier, happier and more just province for all Manitobans. As the holiday season draws to a close, let us carry forward the feelings of good will towards all into this New Year. This is within easier reach than it seems; here are four actions governments and citizens alike can do to make change for the better.

1. Stand with Aboriginal people and support decolonization

A year ago the Idle No More movement and Chief Teresa Spence's hunger strike were daily news stories. First Nations activists drew international attention to unacceptable health and living conditions on reserves. At the same time, First Nations people re-asserted their role as stewards of the land and their right to have a say in economic development that threatens the environment.

Allies to Aboriginal people need to remind the federal government to recognize Canada's responsibility to the treaties and upholding the rights of Indigenous peoples. The federal government recently cut 80 percent of the funding to the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC), seriously threatening the AMC's ability to advocate for the needs of people on reserve. The funding to the AMC and other First Nations governing bodies needs to be reinstated for effective Aboriginal governance.

2. Recognize that a more equal Manitoba is a better and healthier Manitoba

Research has proven that countries with

greater income equality have better overall population health outcomes, lower infant mortality, longer life expectancy, higher quality of life, lower rates of violence and lower rates of incarceration. *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone* by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett analyzes a comprehensive set of indicators from 23 countries, demonstrating quality of life for the overall population improves with a more equal society. Levels of happiness and trust are higher and levels of anxiety lower in more just societies as well.

This means redistributing some resources from those who have plenty to those who have little so that basic needs like food and shelter are met without forcing low income people to rely on charity handouts for survival. Research shows that investing in social housing and capacity-building programs saves money that would otherwise be spent downstream on health care costs, social services and jails.

One action is to build sufficient rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing to meet the demand for low-income housing: 3,000 new units per year are required. Currently the province committed to 500 RGI units over the next three years. The federal government off-loaded this responsibility to the provinces; both the federal and provincial governments need to seriously invest to address this, now chronic, housing crisis.

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3. Build the green economy

The green economy offers promise in the face of the challenge of climate change. For example Manitoba is home to BUILD, a social enterprise whereby people with barriers to employment receive training to do needed residential energy retrofit work. When non-renewable oil sand development is being widely advertised as “sustainable” energy, we need to reframe what it means to be green and look at promising areas of truly green economic development like sustainable public transportation, energy and water retrofits on residential and commercial buildings, green manufacturing, sustainable food production and improved rural and urban planning. The green economy creates jobs while benefiting the environment and public health.

Many promising practices are being showcased; long-term thinking, government incentives and regulation are needed. Manitoba and Canada should recommit to a target for reducing greenhouse gases, and implement concrete measures towards achieving that target.

4. Re-invigorate Manitoba civil society

“The power of the people is greater than the people in power”, a phrase used in the 2011 Arab spring, is an inspiration to citizens around the world to get re-engaged politically. The system of democracy can seem inaccessible to those most marginalized by economic forces, however history has shown change only takes place when the interest and will of citizens is asserted. With social media and traditional organizing approaches, social movements have many available tools to engage with people.

At the same time we must not lose sight of the fact that politicians listen to those who vote. With voter turnout at just over half of eligible voters (59%) in the last federal election in Manitoba, more work needs to be done to encourage those with traditionally low voter turnout rates like young people, Aboriginal people and

newcomers to vote, or even better, run for office!

2014 is almost halfway through this decade and firmly in the 21st century. Governments need to keep up with the complex challenges and opportunities of today. The tools are here: information flows faster than ever and there is a wealth of knowledge in our communities. We must continue to harness this information and knowledge, reframe persistent problems and be proactive so future generations need not struggle with long-standing challenges. With persistence it is possible to create a more just, healthy, sustainable and happier Manitoba for all in 2014!

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