

Help The Aged Canada: Speaking Points

Peggy Taillon

- Good evening Everyone....it is such an honour to stand here before you this evening to celebrate one of Canada's most important and inspired organizations...one that is becoming more important than ever as Canada's social infrastructure continues to erode....
- I want to thank Jacqueline Bannister and the HTAC for their tremendous work and commitment and also all those who have made this even possible ----and of course I we must pause and recognize the venerable Dave Smith who is so giving of his time to so many issues in our amazing community ---- and speaking of commitment, I can't stand up here without recognizing my dear friend Max, who is truly inspiring, his tireless passion and inability to say no , Max you personify leadership and commitment and all of us are better having you in our world...and to all of you thank you and rest a wee bit while I speak because you'll need it for the auction
- Having worked in the health and human services sectors for most of my 24 year career – and for the ideals of social justice throughout my life – the strong connections between social issues and the links between economic, social and human rights have become increasingly clear.
- I've have been thinking a lot recently about what it means to be Canadian. Perhaps that's because I've become a mother to my beautiful son Devlin, following a long and arduous 14-month fight to bring him to Canada from Kenya. Over that time, I watched the people in Kenya struggle but persevere, living with hope and resilience and a sense of community that I have yet to see

elsewhere in the world --- a sense of community we have seemed to have lost in this great country....

- Kenyan friends invariably ask many questions about Canada ---they are so curious about this land of boundless opportunity –envious about the pop culture images that seep into their lives --- they are so envious to see so much wealth against the catastrophic poverty that surrounds them
- When respond, I am always proud and almost idealistic. I speak fondly of Canada’s beauty, its cleanliness, its safety, and I speak about our universal health care system and our social safety net.
- I don’t, however, mention the many complexities of our health and social systems, nor the barriers and silos that are counter intuitive – and counter productive – to the healthy functioning of those systems.
- I remain silent about the fears and preoccupations of many Canadian families who worry about where their children’s next meal will come from, or how they will pay for medications. Or why, despite every effort, employment opportunities don’t materialize, and people are unable to provide for their families or contribute to their communities with dignity. I avoid explaining why after years of hard work, too many Canadians are retiring into poverty, that universal health care is a myth, and that challenges and cut-backs to our social safety net have created large gaps in our nation’s fabric.
- When talking to others about Canada, I tend to ignore those realities because they are as difficult to explain as they are even harder to fathom.
- It is truly inconceivable that a country as well endowed as Canada, a country that prides itself in protecting and empowering the most vulnerable in our society, a country

that was once heralded a moral compass in the international community has become a country of myths. Universal Health Care, the Social Quilt, Peace-Keeping, our Aboriginal Heritage, the Cultural Mosaic were all pillars of Canada's Just Society. Uniquely Canadian, sources of great pride and today, they are more aspirational than real.

- So instead I say that for most people, Canada *is* a land of opportunity, a place where one can safely explore new challenges and enjoy the freedom to make personal decisions without threat of persecution. It is a place where a social safety net exists to help you when you need it.
- Now we all know that is true for most people in Canada. But not for all.
- While Canada does have a social safety net, those who have had the misfortune of trying to navigate it know only too well that the system can feel like a maze, fraught with many traps that seem designed to keep them from prospering and getting to the other side.
- Many Canadians today are also experiencing the impact of financial and economic systems that have failed to recognize their limitations – and more importantly their responsibilities – and now, we are all now paying the price.
- In the din of daily media reports, it would be easy to buy into the message that it's time to hunker down, ask for less, and expect less.
- But let be honest, long before the economy turned sour, generations of Canadians have been experiencing these systemic shortcomings, for them, today's realities only compound years of struggle

- For me, the evidence is clear: Canada has a ballooning social deficit and all of this emphasis on economic stimulus is obviously necessary, but without parallel social stimulus, we are simply creating a recession of another kind – a social recession that is far harder to overcome because it compounds economic hardships, delays prosperity, and ultimately tears communities apart.
- So yes here we are, after 15 years of economic prosperity, and a 20 year old declaration from Canada's government to address poverty, a concerted effort to eliminate poverty in Canada has never been a national priority at a time when we need it most
- Instead, there is no buffer and for many Canadians, little to stop the bottom from falling out of their lives.
- AND once we get to the other side of this downturn...when we start to see glimmers of recovery what will we have learned? And even more importantly what will we change?
- This is a time for leadership, the time for a renewed dialogue. This is precisely the time we need to come together and speak about a shared vision and get back to the basics, rebuild our sense of community...and that big idea of Canada.
- A vision that calls for a fundamental shift and redefinition of the role of government, civil society and the private sector and most importantly their relationship to its citizens
- As I stand here and vent, I know this sounds rather daunting...but I believe the way forward its quite simple...

- Drawing on the values I embrace from Kenya, I think what's required here is a collective response, getting back to the basics of community....shared purpose, a call to collective action to uphold our moral obligations to our community.
- The widows and orphans with whom I work in our village in Kenya understand that together, we can prosper, but alone, we will surely fail.
- They have never had a government 1-800 number to call for any support....they have only ever had each other
- AND seriously, over the past two decades 1-800 Government supports and services have quietly eroded unbeknownst to most Canadians, reliance of organizations like mine and HTAC have increased, government offloading to civil society is very real and every day over 160,000 civil sociality organizations across Canada are now providing former government programs, without the funding or the infrastructure.... this is dangerous...and unsustainable
- Kenyans inherently share what little they have with their community. A woman who has had a good yield from her crop will share it with the village, knowing that others will do the same for her family. No one prospers over another in the village --- as individualism is equal to greed --- sharing is just common sense
- In Kenyan villages, elders and the most vulnerable are revered, they are supported within their communities and in their homes...people come together to provide circles of support for those most in need --- it is about dignity and honour --- it is grounded in a belief that after a life of long hard labour, raising children and community building it is time to give back --- HTAC understands this-- their mission is grounded in these values

- Our elders, the elders in our families and in our communities, whose shoulders we stand on today, deserve our reverence...
- Just imagine what we could do here in Canada if we were all willing to walk across the street a few times a week to check on ageing neighbours, and share food with them during the cold winter when soaring energy costs prevent them from making regular trips to the market. Renovate our homes to accommodate our parents and grandparents when they could no longer live on their own
- Imagine what we could do if we all looked at our individual success as something that must be shared in order to have real value.
- So yes let's imagine, dream and do.... Let's be proud of what we ultimately leave on the ground... that Big idea of Canada

THANK YOU