

June 29, 2020

**ZOOM CONFERENCE: BASIC INCOME & THE ARTS SECTOR
SENATOR PATRICIA BOVEY REMARKS**

“Culture is the motor of any successful society” -- so said John Ralston Saul. Culture is created by people, artists and those engaged in the arts. Artists sustain society through good and bad, like the COVID pandemic, yet comprise the largest percentage of working poor living below the poverty line. Not a pretty picture is it?

Where do Basic Income and the arts sector intersect? I first spoke on this in the Senate in May 2017. Can we get there now? Even with all the current support, we don't yet have enough. We must think creatively for our next steps.

Artists, arts workers and presenters in all disciplines should benefit from basic income. But we must understand the multi societal intersections. I don't think silo-ing sectors, however helpful in securing data, will win the big arguments ahead. In all my presentations on basic income, I don't address it sector by sector, not the 'arts sector' or any sector, but rather as the human dimension as a whole, using stats I know best. Those are arts stats and they are powerful.

We know the principles of basic income as enabling every Canadian to be able to buy food, clothes, medications and have a roof over their head, and not having to live as too many do, making the choice of which it will be for that month.

The arts, artists and arts workers are everywhere -- in every corner of this country affecting every aspect throughout society. Their impact is huge and central. But all too often the arts are relegated as a silo -- something people do in their leisure time. NOT SO! Arts and culture form the platform for all society. I have just finished writing on the Arts as the voice of contemporary society, raising societal issues often long before the balance of society sees whatever that issue might be. Poverty is a visceral one, depicted in every media.

How have the arts built society's platform, and how do we get all ministries and wider society on deck for a basic income? WITH FACTS, proving how the arts HELP every ministry achieve their goals.

In Health we know arts participants live 2 years longer than others, cost the health system less; miss less work and get out of hospital earlier; The arts are Canada's third largest employer; Our Senate study proved the arts importance in Canada's Foreign Policy; The staggering Arts GDP numbers are vital to Canada's economy; Artists illuminate environmental issues visibly and convincingly- from Emily Carr's 1930s clear cut paintings; to Aganetha Dyck's bee collaborations. Artists in every discipline consistently draw attention to the environment; The back bone of Canada's tourism, the arts catapulted us into the top ten countries to visit -- 22% of Toronto overnights stays were due to the arts in 2010; The arts, essential in education, improve children's learning outcomes; Smaller Canadian communities have been kept alive by the arts -- BC's Powell River's international choral festival, the Shaw Festival, Stratford, or indeed summer festivals across the country; Arts' impact on crime prevention is huge, for kids and adults, and is recognized by enforcement agencies.

Let's give the arts a basic income and help them help society as a whole. Despite the sector being integral to all of society, we have 'allowed' artists to become the largest group of working poor living below the poverty line. What an anomaly! Basic Income gives the opportunity to fix that, as many of you heard me say repeatedly across the country.

Are you surprised many of Canada's artists live in their studios? Many in condemned buildings? I've climbed countless flights of stairs to reach studios that most Canadians would consider absolutely uninhabitable, cooking in the same spaces where they work with toxic materials.

The situation during COVID recovery will worsen for the arts before it improves, particularly for the performing arts as audiences overcome their fear of entering concert halls and theaters. The GIG economy has been hard hit. But, through these pandemic months Canadian artists' generosity in all disciplines has been stellar -- How many digital performances, exhibitions, gallery tours, and concerts have we seen? How many of those artists earned money for those digital presentations?

Getting the Ministers of Heritage and Finance on side is not enough. All Ministries must be on deck. We do that by showing how the arts sector helps each of them. We DO have a substantive argument. We must ensure those arguments are strong, and numbers up to date, recognizing they differ across Canada, as my years of empirical and anecdotal research show. We must also understand the roles of Provinces, Territories, and Self-Governing First Nations.

I challenge us all to compile data regarding interconnections between sectors, at local, regional, provincial AND federal levels. In my view, a multipronged approach will be much more likely to succeed than a single approach. Your stories and realities are important. I loved the police officer who told me though he knew nothing about art, he wanted to be on Winnipeg's public art committee because he knew its impact. He became a keen, articulate spokesperson for our case. Let us find unlikely spokespeople and take the arts part well beyond the arts sector.

Art empowers; art has the ability to change society; art has the ability to question; art leads; art has vision -- Let's let the arts sector work with all sectors to build the case for Basic Income.

My family mantra is "We are all better off when we are all better off". Let's make society as a whole better off -- the arts built the platform, now let the arts carry the message to build a new reality. Let's all be better off!