

Some Canadians left behind: Romanow

BY JEREMY WARREN, THE STARPHOENIX OCTOBER 27, 2011

Former Saskatchewan premier Roy Romanow says not enough Canadians are enjoying the benefits of a growing economy.

Romanow, in the inaugural Bryan Woods Memorial Lecture Wednesday night, gave a brief overview of the newly-released Canadian Index of Wellbeing, a project that measures the quality of life using 64 indicators using indicators from social, health, environmental and economic categories. Romanow chairs the project's advisory board.

"Throughout the 20th century and into the 21st, most countries have traditionally adopted a narrow view of what constitutes progress and how it is measured," Romanow told a packed crowd at the Broadway Theatre.

"In the absence of real tools for tracking changes in the quality of our life, the GDP -gross domestic product - has emerged as somewhat of a surrogate of well being - It doesn't tell us anything about how well or how poorly people are doing in their lives."

The well-being index, released earlier this month, uses Statistics Canada data to measure quality of life between 1994 and 2008. Growth is good most of the time, Romanow argued, but GDP doesn't measure the positives and negatives of economic activity, such as the harm caused by spending on tobacco or the contributions of unpaid housework and volunteerism.

As Canada's gross domestic product grew 31 per cent between 1994 and 2008, the well-being index grew only 11 per cent, Romanow said. During the same period, most of the growth in family incomes went to the richest 20 per cent of families, and the gap between the richest 20 per cent and poorest 20 per cent grew larger than ever, Romanow said. Real wage increases also grew slower than corporate profit increases, he added.

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