

**Poverty must be addressed, *KW Record* (Oct 18, 2006).**

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## **W. ROBERT NEEDHAM**

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David Johnston is to be commended for the statement of vision attached to his fundraising efforts for the University of Waterloo and, by extension, for the Region of Waterloo (Ten Goals For The Region's Success: We Can Be The Knowledge Capital Of Canada -- Sept. 22).

His words seem, in fact ,to reflect a model of regional development that has been taught at the University of Waterloo and elsewhere for at least 30 years. He stresses an umbrella triad of technology, talent and tolerance.

In stressing poverty as a problem to be reckoned with he is implicitly turning tolerance upside down and saying we should be intolerant of systemically generated social costs. But there are other social costs. Why not compile a detailed list of social costs to be eliminated? For example, deaths in the workplace. Shouldn't we be intolerant of even one death in the workplace? Shouldn't we be intolerant of environmental destruction?

Talent can entrepreneurially bend both technology and organization to overcoming the social cost problems the system itself generates. Some of this is underway.

The poverty issue, like other social costs, is national in scope. There has long been a recognized solution route to poverty in the concept of an unconditional basic income provided to every man woman and child from birth to death. This would contribute to greater equality of life chances for many people otherwise marginalized by the system, and as a result, the pool of potential entrepreneurial talent can be expected to be larger.

What holds back the implementation of an unconditional basic income has primarily to do with those who exercise power and control over the economics of the system. Is it too much to suggest that the chief executive officers of our public and private institutions, including heads of the publicly funded universities and colleges, use their considerable influence to see that a UBI is introduced in Canada. Such action would be entirely consistent with the equality rights of citizenship built into our Constitution and into the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of which Canada is a signatory. Why not?

Another freedom generating policy would be the abolition or substantial reform of the practice of creating debt slavery as a result of the lending power of banks and other

financial institutions. The effects on life chances and the potential pool of entrepreneurs would be the same as with the UBI proposal. Why not?

"He is certainly not a good citizen who does not wish to promote, by every means in his power, the welfare of the whole society of his fellow-citizens," said Adam Smith in his Theory of Moral Sentiments.

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