

**Media Release
For Immediate Release
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Vancouver, Unceded Coast Salish Territory**

**Welfare Challenge takers call for higher welfare rates
and the eradication of poverty**

People who want much higher welfare rates took over Vancouver City Council Chambers on Sunday, October 23. They gathered to talk about what it was like to eat on just \$18 a week, and what needs to be done about the dire poverty that the BC government is forcing people on welfare to endure. However, the takeover was helped by the city that donated the space and passed a proclamation declaring last week, Raise the Rates week. October 16–22 was the 5th annual Welfare Food Challenge. This year over 200 people from all parts of BC participated.

Jenny Kwan, the MP for Vancouver East admitted that she cheated on the challenge when she had to buy \$17 worth of medicine for her cough. Irene Lanzinger, President of the BC Federation of Labour admitted stressing out over dropping and bruising an apple. MLA Spencer Chandra Herbert confessed to wanting to eat all the food for the week at one time so he wouldn't go to bed hungry. "Hangry" is a new word that Lillian Yin, a dietitian, invented during her time doing the Challenge, meaning angry and hungry. Yin said that current welfare rates are a risk factor for diabetes. Vancouver City Councillor Andrea Reimer confessed to almost crying when the coffee pot she was using in a hotel to cook some food stopped working. The smallest mishap can destroy the budget of people on welfare.

But Fraser Stuart summed up the feeling of the meeting when he noted that people on welfare live about 10 fewer years than others, and commented, "Government is murdering people with its policies." Fraser talked about trying to boil eggs in a coffee pot because you have no cooking facilities in an SRO. Fraser Doke talked about asking the Ministry responsible for welfare for the funds to buy 2 bottles of Ensure per day as directed by his Doctor for his health needs. "The ministry workers said they understood I needed the Ensure," said Fraser, "but the system won't give it to you."

The comments came at the Town Hall meeting at the end of the week-long Welfare Food Challenge where volunteers who aren't on welfare agree to eat on the amount of money that a single person on welfare would have. All provincial MLAs were asked to do the challenge but only two accepted, Spencer Chandra Herbert from Vancouver West End and Melanie Mark from Vancouver Mt. Pleasant, both from the NDP.

Chandra Herbert was revealing when talking about what needed to be done and what he would do to change the situation. "I've got to bring 34 MLAs and the other New Democrats on side." Then Chandra Herbert went on, "In some communities the level of poor bashing is very high. We have to continue this level of awareness raising." Chandra Herbert thanked Raise the Rates for putting pressure on us "because there are other louder voices."

When asked what needed to be done, Reimer suggested the first step should be to immediately raise welfare shelter rates from \$375 a month to \$600 and to make it possible to cook in SRO hotel rooms. Next, welfare should be indexed to the cost of housing, she said.

**Raise the Rates
Can you Live on \$610 a month?
Justice not Charity**

