

## 'Poverty Olympics' highlight priorities clash

By ANDREA HAYLEY  
Epoch Times Staff

VANCOUVER—The Olympic flame will light up Vancouver on Feb. 12, and the Games, which have been years and millions of dollars in the making, will officially begin.

Meanwhile, five days earlier in a part of Vancouver famous for being the poorest neighborhood in the country, over 500 activists and residents will celebrate their own games.

Dubbed the Poverty Olympics, these counter games come complete with a torch relay, opening and closing ceremonies, and events such as the Housing Hurdle, Hockey with the VANOC Predators, and Wrestling for the Community.

The three Poverty Olympics mascots—Itchy the Bedbug, Chewy the Rat, and Creepy the Cockroach—will also be on hand.

Launched on Jan. 17, the torch relay will travel through 16 British Columbia communities, winding up at the Japanese Hall in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside where the Poverty Olympics will take place on Feb. 7.

"We are really trying to embarrass Canada in the eyes of the world because of the poverty that it's creating among its own citizens," said event coordinator Jean Swanson of the Carnegie Community Action Project.

"We want to show the world that Canada is a really wealthy country, but it has a lot of unnecessary, desperate poverty, and we want to show that if the money that was spent on the Olympics was spent on poverty and homelessness those two things could be ended."

Swanson said the event has attracted the attention of foreign media in town for the Games, with reporters from Germany, Sweden, Finland, the LA Times, the Wall Street Journal, a few Arabic newspapers and an Arabic TV station all contacting organizers for interviews.

This is the third Poverty Olympics, and this year organizers went as far as asking the International Olympics Committee to officially recognize their humble games.

"They wrote back and said that their job was to promote hope in the world and that they wouldn't do anything to pressure the government to reduce poverty," said Swanson.

With an estimated 8,000 international media arriving for the Games, the provincial and city governments in partnership with over 30 non-profit groups have opened a media relations centre in the Downtown Eastside to showcase what is being done to address homelessness.

The center's home—the atrium of the brand new mixed-use Woodward's development on the Eastside's renowned Hastings Street—is an example of a project enabled or sped up by those who dreamed of an Olympic legacy that would benefit average Vancouverites.

"The Connect centre shows how these investments have made a positive difference both socially and economically for Downtown Eastside residents because of the strong partnerships between the Province, City of Vancouver, non-profit groups and the private sector," Housing Min-

Poster advertising the third annual Poverty Olympics. CARNEGIE COMMUNITY ACTION PROJECT

ister Rich Coleman said at the opening on Monday. Swanson said a "huge issue" for residents of the Downtown Eastside is gentrification, something that was increasing gradually but has intensified with the advent of the Games.

"The city has just decided to allow seven more towers in the area so it's getting really bad, and hotel rents—people live in these single rooms in hotels, old hotels, and the rents are going up over \$500 and \$600. People are being pushed out who are poor and the city doesn't seem to care," she said.

On Tuesday, Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson presented a motion calling for the city's Homeless Action Plan to be revised with a target for ending street homelessness by 2015.

"There's no bigger challenge we face in Vancouver than ending street homelessness," said the mayor in a statement. "We've got a long way to go, but by revising and refocusing the Homeless Action Plan, we can renew our efforts and put the City on a clear path to help people get off the street and into homes."

The revisions would include a homeless count specific to Vancouver; an annual progress report on homelessness; a long-term plan that reflects the current economic climate; and options for optimizing city real estate and assets that can strategically leverage funding from other orders of government, private donors and investors for solutions for street homelessness.

# Mayors urge ongoing infrastructure funding

### Public and private sector leaders say stimulus is only a start, global survey finds

By CINDY CHAN  
Epoch Times Staff

OTTAWA—Canada's mayors are highlighting the importance of infrastructure and calling for long-term and increased funding, even as the federal government is preparing for a March 4 budget and years of restraint to tackle a looming deficit following a flood of stimulus spending.

The mayors are not alone. Echoing their call is a global survey released Monday reporting that public sector officials and private sector executives from dozens of countries say that the stimulus is only a start.

Government effectiveness and funding remain the top challenges to infrastructure development, public and private leaders in the infrastructure field say.

The survey was the third in a series of infrastructure surveys commissioned over the past year by Switzerland-based

tax and accounting giant KPMG International.

Respondents from the two sectors also shared the view that politicization of project priorities is a major obstacle to effective infrastructure development.

Both sectors are calling for increased accountability and transparency, better-trained infrastructure agencies, greater public-private partnership, and a long-term infrastructure investment strategy.

The survey was released on the heels of an Atlantic Mayors Congress meeting last Friday at which the mayors urged the federal government to stay the course on its local infrastructure funding as it works to eliminate the country's budget deficit, which stands at \$56 billion this fiscal year.

"Most Canadians believe investments in local infrastructure are among the most important we can make," the congress said in a statement.

"Canadians want these investments to continue, and we agree, because they are effective and important," the mayors said, citing a recent Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) poll that found that 69 percent of Canadians rank local infrastructure investments second only to health care in importance.

The poll also showed that 96 percent of Canadians want the government to maintain or increase funding for local infrastructure.

The Conservative government's

\$4 billion Infrastructure Stimulus Fund gives money to provincial and municipal governments for projects that must finish by March 31, 2011.

But the Atlantic mayors say that this deadline "could prevent the completion of important projects in the region and shut the flow of important stimulus before our economy has fully recovered."

They are asking for the deadline to be extended to Dec. 31, 2011.

The mayors of Canada's 22 largest cities—members of the FCM's Big City Mayors' Caucus—have expressed the same concerns and are asking the federal government to continue working with cities to meet long-term infrastructure needs.

"Together with the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, we're co-funding infrastructure projects that will create more than half the 220,000 jobs promised in the Economic Action Plan," said Carl Zehr, chair of the caucus and mayor of Kitchener, Ontario.

The stimulus program is "helping cities build and repair the roads, bridges, public transit and water systems that are the backbone of our economy and quality of life," said Mayor Pat Fiocco of Regina, Saskatchewan.

"Now we need to bring all partners together at a national infrastructure summit to turn those investments into a down payment on our long-term infrastructure needs."



Scientists from 28 countries have called on Quebec Premier Jean Charest, currently in India on a trade mission, to ban asbestos exports. India is Canada's largest importer of asbestos. EMMANUEL DUNAND/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

## End asbestos exports, scientists tell Charest

**ASBESTOS CONTINUED FROM P1**  
Asbestos was widely used around the world between the 1950s and the 1970s. Because of its status as a deadly carcinogen, the European Union banned the mineral over a decade ago. Thetford Mines in Quebec, a town of 26,000, is home to Canada's only remaining asbestos mining operation.

Despite its links to cancer and other health problems, several countries, mostly in the developing world, still import asbestos from Canada. The less dusty chrysotile, or white, asbestos is said to be a safer form of the product.

The position taken by the governments of Canada and Québec is that chrysotile asbestos can be used safely as long as strict precautions are followed. The Indian asbestos industry also claims that the country's factories have safety protocols in place to protect workers.

The Chrysotile Institute, an asbestos lobby group, dismissed the concerns raised in the scientists' letter.

"Instead of giving new scientific research or data, they are just launching accusations," the institute's president, Clément Godbout, told the Canadian Press.

"If they have new data and studies showing that the way chrysotile is used today in Canada and Québec is an unacceptable risk for people, please send them to us because I've never seen such a study."

The scientists also want Québec to

stop funding the pro-asbestos lobby. New Democrat MP Pat Martin, who has long opposed Canada's asbestos policy, said no other commodity enjoys the protection of the Canadian government the way the \$100-million-a-year asbestos industry does.

"More than 160 trade junkets in 60 different countries is what the asbestos industry brags it has done through our Canadian embassies, our trade commissioners, etc. Not even Canadian wheat is so aggressively promoted as much as the asbestos industry," he told India Abroad newspaper.

He explained that "there's an emotional affinity for asbestos in Québec" that stems from the great asbestos strike of 1949, traditionally portrayed as a turning point in Québec history that eventually led to the so-called Quiet Revolution. It also helped launch the political career of former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau.

After René Lévesque was elected premier in the 1976, one of the first things he did was to nationalize the asbestos industry—the first national act of the new nation of Québec, as Lévesque put it.

"Now, the people of Québec talk of asbestos with pride because of its history. It is too emotional a question for Québecers. It is almost anti-Québec to be anti-asbestos," Martin said.

Martin, who once worked in an asbestos mine in the Yukon Territory, has been lobbying to have asbestos put on the international list of hazard-

ous substances. He told India Abroad that both Canada and India should "join hands" in seeking a ban on asbestos in all its forms.

"Asbestos and tobacco are the two industries where the industry knows well it is killing people, but it survives by junk science and aggressive lobbying of politicians," he said.

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