

Third Session – Forty-First Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
Standing Committee
on
Social and Economic Development

Chairperson
Mr. Len Isleifson
Constituency of Brandon East

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Monday, December 4, 2017

TIME – 6 p.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East)

VICE-CHAIRPERSON – Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River)

ATTENDANCE – 11 QUORUM – 6

Members of the Committee present:

Hon. Messrs. Fielding, Gerrard, Wishart

Messrs. Allum, Bindle, Isleifson, Johnston, Lagassé, Meses. Lathlin, Morley-Lecomte, Mrs. Smith

MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

Annual Report of the Manitoba Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy (All Aboard) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2017

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Clerk Assistant (Ms. Monique Grenier): Good evening. Will the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development please come to order.

Your first item of business is the election of a Chairperson.

Are there any nominations for this position?

Mr. Scott Johnston (St. James): I would nominate Mr. Isleifson.

Clerk Assistant: Mr. Isleifson has been nominated.

Are there any other nominations?

Seeing no other nominations, Mr. Isleifson, will you please take the Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Good evening, everybody. And our next item of business is the election of a Vice-Chair. Are there any nominations?

Mr. Kelly Bindle (Thompson): I'd like to nominate Ms. Morley-Lecomte.

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Morley-Lecomte has been nominated. Any other nominations? Seeing none, we will declare Ms. Morley-Lecomte the Vice-Chair.

So, again, welcome. This meeting has been called to consider the Annual Report of the Manitoba Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy (All Aboard) for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2017.

Before we get started, are there any suggestions from the committee as to how long we should sit this evening?

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Mr. Chairperson, 8 o'clock.

Mr. Chairperson: Eight o'clock? Sounds good. Is that agreed, 8 o'clock? *[Agreed]*

To this point, does the honourable minister wish to make an opening statement?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): I do.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay.

Mr. Fielding: Well, thank you very much for assembling here today to discuss the efforts to reduce poverty here in the province of Manitoba. Addressing poverty is a shared responsibility of all Manitobans. However, the group has a particular responsibility for considering the impact a Manitoba strategy in—having on truly vulnerable Manitobans here in the province.

The Manitoba government has taken many steps to address low-income Manitobans, including things like indexing the basic personal exemption to inflation, which has removed close to 2,100 Manitobans from the tax rolls and saved taxpayers money that they would be paying in of upwards of \$21 million; fully indexing the benefits under the Rent Assist program to assist low-income Manitobans living in the private market, supporting private—or, rather, social enterprise for Manitoba Housing, which provides training and employment opportunities for more than 200 individuals.

The government has also increased the Rent Assist budget by upwards of \$39 million, which has

taken about 2,213 more—or provided supports to over 2,200 more Manitobans.

We also—well, there was a decision about a year and a half—a year—about a year ago—year and a half ago, with the changes in the CCB from the federal government, and so we're very proud of the fact that we didn't claw any of those benefits back from individual families that were a part of it.

We've also made some substantial investments in housing. We signed a \$90-million agreement with the federal government in terms of housing solutions for Manitobans, which we'll outline, I'm sure, throughout the rest of the day's period, as well as future investments and negotiations with the federal government in terms of the national housing strategy.

Also, getting people back into the work, into jobs, for low-unemployment individuals. We've created a system called jobs on market, which is really a rapid redeployment system that allows individuals to get back to work. I think, on average, there's been over 300 cases that have closed and it really gets people back to work.

I know the Minister of Education's here and has also been involved in the REDI program, a very successful program that links up refugees, essentially, with jobs. Minister Wishart will be able to explain a little bit further on that in a more cohesive way.

And so those are some of the initiatives that we have done. 'manito's' new poverty reduction strategy is being developed—sorry; Manitoba is developing a new poverty reduction strategy. An integral part of the review and update of Manitoba's poverty reduction strategy will be to connect with Manitobans to hear ideas and insights about how to help Manitobans out of poverty, as well as prevent poverty, and that's something—very proud of. We're going to be talking to people that are going through real poverty on the streets.

I want to take this opportunity to highlight a number of public consultation activities which will help inform Manitoba's new poverty reduction strategy.

The Poverty Reduction Committee met on October 30th, 2017 and endorsed a multi-channel consultation plan which includes an online survey, invitation to written submissions, community workshops of stakeholders and discussions with individuals and families with lived experience of poverty.

Through consultation efforts we will be seeking input on the following general categories related to poverty and why government chose—everyday living: basic needs, education and training, employment, health and well-being, and sense of belonging.

* (18:10)

Beginning this month, consultations with persons who have lived experience in poverty will take place in Winnipeg and a call for written submissions will be made available online for services—for service providers, organizations, advocates, experts and all members of the public.

Our first session will—our first session with people with lived experience in poverty is taking place on November 29th—28th and 29th in Winnipeg addressing sessions in Selkirk, Brandon, and also be held in early December. We also have a session beginning—planned in Thompson, you know, a few weeks after that.

I'd also like to let you know that there'll be an online survey which would be available to the public early 2018, and community conversations and workshops will continue into the new year.

Our government is listening to—our government is a listening government that in the end—to the end that in-person community workshops will focus on gaining perspectives for service providers, community based organizations, experts and advocates, indigenous organizations and persons with lived experience in poverty.

Listening to others will help us find the best ways to learn about what is working, what isn't working and where we could be developing new partnerships and focus our efforts to see measurement—measurable progress in reducing poverty. While financial resources are a constraint here in Manitoba, Manitoba will continue to invest improving the lives of low-income Manitobans, both on focusing on the most vulnerable individuals we think is important.

We also want to make sure that we're aligned with the federal government's initiatives, and poverty is, of course, a complex multifaceted process that just not one government can solve, it needs to be community groups, agencies, organizations, as well as the federal government need to be a part of that.

Moving the needle to reduce poverty in Manitoba requires innovative solutions combined with strong partnerships and leveraging opportunities

to align with work and investments of occurring at the federal, municipal and local government levels.

Manitoba also welcomes the Government of Canada's development of a federal poverty reduction strategy. We understand the—what we've heard a report from consultations will be released in the coming months. We anticipate the 2018 federal budget will sign—will signal the Government of Canada's plan to—for poverty reduction.

We look forward to the release of the federal strategy next year. We want to make sure that both our policies are aligned as there is different measures you can take from the federal-provincial level. While we work on renewing Manitoba's poverty reduction strategy we will remain engaged in current federal government in their efforts to identify opportunities for alignment.

To that end, I'll be meeting with my fellow ministers responsible for social services in the new year to discuss the alleviation of poverty in Canada and how its jurisdictions can collaborate together for better outcomes.

In conclusion, I look forward to the discussion poverty reduction annual report for '16 and '17 with you here today, and respond to any questions.

I will close my remarks by again expressing gratitude for being involved in something as important as poverty reduction. This day is a reminder that poverty is multi-dimensional and that challenges associated with reducing poverty are complex. However, we are going to take on this challenge head on.

The opportunities to address the needs of those living in poverty go beyond a single department or level of government. Indeed, reducing poverty is a shared responsibility among all levels of government, the private and non-profit sector and everyday Manitobans.

We are also fortunate to serve the people of Manitoba, and on its critical—and it's critical to recognize the possible impacts of our decisions can make on the everyday lives of vulnerable Manitobans.

So, with that, Mr. Chair, I will end—yield.

Mr. Chairperson: And we thank the honourable minister for those comments.

And does the critic of the official opposition have an opening statement?

Mrs. Smith: Just a short one to put some words on the record.

You know, I look forward to working with this government, as someone who grew up in poverty, worked with families in education that are in poverty, and as, you know, the MLA for Point Douglas, as you know that's probably one of the poorest communities in Manitoba.

So I look forward to, you know, working on solutions and actions that are actually going to get people out of poverty, get people working and make sure that future generations aren't finding themselves in poverty, as well, because, as we know, we have to invest in our future, and our future is our children.

And, as someone who benefited from social programs that helped me get out of poverty, which means, you know, my children aren't in poverty. Both my older children, they have well-paid jobs, they're both in trades. My daughter is 15. She's in high school. You know, they're not going to have to worry about being in poverty or someone having to help them with education because I was helped.

So, you know, I look forward to working on solutions and tangible actions that are going to really help Manitobans get out of poverty. Miigwech.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much for those comments, and, with that, the floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Smith: So the Premier (Mr. Pallister) promised a review of the All Aboard strategy in his election campaign. He promised to launch a new strategy by the end of this year. As we know, there's a month until this year is gone. Instead, the government announced that they'll have more consultations, you know, on a strategy, and I heard you reference that you had consulted on November 28th and 29th of this year. Is that correct?

Mr. Fielding: You're right. So, under the Poverty Reduction Strategy, in subsection 2.5, states the strategy must be updated and reviewed within every five years. The advocacy organizations like make history poverty have talked about this as well. And so we are abiding by the current legislation of the five-year review. Obviously, that goes on until the end of the fiscal year, which will be underway, and so we're pleased to start the process off. We want to make sure we are getting it done right.

We know that there is a federal process that's underway and we understand that their process—

they've already released parts of the—what we've heard documents will be in the new year. So there's different levers that the Province can have and the federal government can have and we want to make sure that it's aligned. So we want to make sure it's a robust process that we're talking to Manitobans about.

Mrs. Smith: So I asked a question about consultation on November 28th and 29th, those dates that you specifically referenced. Can you tell me where those consultations happened and who they were with? And—

Mr. Fielding: Yes, October–November 28th and 29th, lived-experience consultations, that's people that experience poverties, facilitated by the RaY, resource for youth, 26 participants. On one of the consultation sessions there was 14 individuals that participated and the second there was 12.

Mrs. Smith: When does this government plan to release this new strategy?

Mr. Fielding: Well, we want to make sure we're getting it done right, and so that's what the consultation is about. We would like to make sure that consultation is a part of the process going forward.

Mrs. Smith: You know, you've been in power for about 18 months now. This was an election promise; we're now 18 months into it. And I hear what you're saying; you want to get it right. I get all that but people are living in poverty now, you know. They're facing homelessness, as I'm sure you heard with RaY. They work directly with, you know, youth that are on the streets, facing, you know, numerous issues.

Just wondering why it's taken so long, besides getting it right—and I've heard that twice already—besides that, why it's taken so long for this government to put in this—a strategy and meet with, you know, participants.

Mr. Fielding: Well, I—thank you. I would argue that the government has taken strong action already. Some of them, for instance, is in terms of the Rent Assist. We know that the Rent Assist budget has increased just over last year by about \$39 million. So really what that means is there's about 2,200 more people that are supported since we came to office than 'preor' to—prior to that. So, really, when you break that down, 2,200 people is a lot of people. It probably represents close to filling up the convention

centre twice over. So there is a lot more people that are supported.

We've also taken some action in terms of the tax code by some people that are on the lowest income. The basic personal exemption, of course, has been changed, and so that's going to have a really positive impact on close to 2,100 individuals that would be—that really that have fallen off the tax rolls because of the changes. So that's a major initiative, we think, of the government.

Also, no clawbacks to the CCB—that was one of the first decisions that we made in government from a poverty point of view. When the federal government made the changes to the child tax benefit, there was a decision that the government had to make and the decision was either we would, you know, essentially claw back that amount, or what we would do is maintain that. And I think if you look at the time—again, it was probably about a year ago now or a little bit longer, there was actually some pretty wide support from the advocates for poverty that suggested that that was a strong process to go forward.

*(18:20)

I'd also suggest, you know, in terms of some other action the government has taken, is our investments in affordable housing. We signed a \$90-million agreement with the SIF funding to support a number of housing solutions. We all know that housing, of course, is a big focal point of poverty, and so we're very proud of the fact that, over the last two years, we've been able to sign additional \$90 million in supports for it.

And also, the—a big part of it—and sometimes it gets lost in the big picture—is really giving people a hand up and allowing them to get into work markets. So we've taken a focal point on getting people kind of a rapid response into a job again. And, again, that involves things like building on markets—Jobs On Markets, rather, and that's kind of a rapid redeployment of people. It's people in the general assistance category of EIA to get them jobs.

And what they've shown, actually, from this has been over thousands of people that have gone through the system, and they've closed upwards of—I had 300 in my notes, but I think it's actually quite higher, as well as the Minister of Education's been doing a lot of work on getting low-income individuals back to work by the REDI program. Again, that's for not just Syrian refugees, but

refugees, to give them jobs as well as, kind of, our commitment to social enterprise, because we think that, obviously, building those supports and services—for the most part, people say that \$1 invested in social enterprise will yield you back about \$4, and so Manitoba Housing has been kind of a leader in that area.

And so I guess my point—my long-winded point—politician—I tend to be long-winded these days, but—is I think there has been a lot of work that has happened, and there's a consultation process that we're meeting with people. We've met with the All Aboard Committee four times this year, so there's actually been a lot of work and a lot initiatives that the government has taken on to address poverty head-on, and we're excited for the new process going forward as we're following through with the legislative mandate put forth by the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Mrs. Smith: I just want to say that, you know, as an NDP government, we are super proud that we brought the Rent Assist into, you know, Manitoba for Manitobans to, you know, not have to take out of their EIA, their income, to pay for rent. We also know that it's been cut, since you've come into government, for a lot of Manitobans.

So my question is, who else are you consulting with in terms of poverty reduction in this strategy?

Mr. Fielding: Yes, again, I think we've got a dispute of the facts of the Rent Assist program, because, you're right, there has been some changes to deductibility of the program. The reality is, the program has been increased. The government could make a decision not to increase it by \$39 million, but we made that choice to do it, and I can tell you, the way the financial situation has been left over the years, there wasn't a lot of extra money around, so when you make substantial investments to the tune of \$39 million, it is a substantial investment.

And, actually, when you look at it—again, I guess what we're saying is we're pretty proud of the fact that over 2,200 more people are supported by the Rent Assist program. And, when you break it down, even in the subcategories, like, even in your own constituency of Point Douglas, there's actually about 170 more people that are supported under our government's initiatives under the Rent Assist program. So that's quite a substantial—just in your own constituency.

Plus, if you look at other areas, in areas like seniors, for instance, there's actually about 313—this is based on March numbers. They've probably gone up a little bit since then. But more people that are supported under the Rent Assist program, the budgets that we supported the Rent Assist program, and over 1,302 families—more families are supported under the program that we have.

So the long story short is, you know, I guess I would say is some changes to deductibility, but there's a vast majority more people are supported under our program than under the previous program.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): Again, I'm just going to continue on with her questions in regards to who you are consulting with. In particular, there is in my constituency—as their MLA, I've visited many of our communities. In regards to Manitoba Housing, that seems to be a hot topic where I come from. And, in regards to Manitoba Housing, it's not as if we have too much choices to make, regardless of Manitoba Housing. In particular, with Cormorant and Moose Lake, I've attended meetings where single parents, mothers, who have gotten jobs, higher income for—on behalf of their other family. Within their communities, tiny communities such as Cormorant and Moose Lake, all right, income has increased. Now their Manitoba Housing rental has increased as well.

So how can we work together to look at this policy to help transition, to help in our single families, you know, reach incomes where they can afford hockey, where they can afford after-school programs, where they can afford, maybe, a little bit more, you know, luxuries for our kids? But, instead, these two parents had to quit their jobs in order to have a roof over their heads.

So my question is, how can we work together to look at this policy to help transition more successfully for parents such as that, who want more for their families, instead of having to quit their jobs in order to keep a roof over their heads?

Mr. Fielding: Well, first of all, thank you for your comments, and I know, and being a rural member, I know must—how difficult it must be travelling back and forth to your constituency. I know you're a hard-working MLA, so I just want to recognize that right off the bat.

You know, we do want to work with more people and create solutions. Right now, you know, we have—we are creating some housing solutions

right now, right? There's about 141 new social housing units that are being created. There's over 327 social and affordable housing units that are being committed to. We also do think that the Rent Assist program is something that could be broad in scale.

So we do want a balanced approach, and I guess the final point that I would suggest, you know, it is interesting and exciting times, I would suggest, in the housing field, because there has been a fairly big commitment with the federal government in terms of the provincial housing strategy, going forward. And we want to be a partner with the federal government to create some more housing solutions for Manitobans. We don't see it necessarily just, maybe, the government kind of creating the—you know, there is a—the feds have talked a lot about the portable housing shelter benefit, similar to this Rent Assist program, that could be, you know—provide some choice to individuals and that sort of—so we are trying to take a bit of a balanced approach with the housing solutions and there, of course, with the federal government, of course, has talked about, with indigenous communities, a separate funding window that would be there that could provide some funds that we think we could partner with.

So I'm not sure if that answers your question totally, but, you know, we're willing to work with individuals and we want to make sure that there's solutions out there that's affordable and we can get the most bang for buck in terms of the housing solutions.

Mrs. Smith: Can you tell us who else you're consulting with besides RaY?

Mr. Fielding: Yes, I'm going to—maybe what I'll do is I will table the news release that we did put out that will talk about the areas that we're going to. I—and I do have a listing of all the groups I will read off, if you like, into the record.

We are going to Winnipeg, we're going to Selkirk, we're going to Thompson—where else am I missing here—Brandon and locations in other areas within Winnipeg.

The groups that we are consulting, invited to—organizations, stakeholder groups are places like—organizations like the Right to Housing, Canadian Mental Health Association, Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg, the Canadian Community Economic Development Network, make history poverty—Make Poverty History Manitoba, End Homelessness

Winnipeg, EIA Advocates Network, Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council, Youth Agencies Alliance, Manitoba association of newcomer servicing agent organizations, Coalition of Manitoba Neighbourhood Renewal Corporations, Society for Manitobans with Disabilities, Manitoba Non-Profit Housing Association, Abilities Manitoba, Manitoba Association of Friendship Centres, Manitoba Association of Women's Shelters, Food Matters Manitoba, Manitoba Child Care Association, Manitoba Harm Reduction Network, Transgender Health Coalition, Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, Child Care Coalition of Manitoba, Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, Manitoba School Boards Association, Manitoba Association of Parent Councils and the Brandon Neighbourhood Rehabilitation Corporation, just to name a few.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. Just to clarify, you were going to, Mr.—or honourable Minister, you were going to table a document?

Mr. Fielding: I could—

Mr. Chairperson: Do you have a copy of that and we can—we'll make a copy of it.

Mr. Fielding: Sure, I'll table that.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

* (18:30)

Ms. Lathlin: You named that Thompson is one of your sessions that are planned. With all due respect, I would love to have The Pas as part of your travel plans. As a former employment consultant with Manitoba government, I've dealt with a lot of clients whose—we helped with action plans to get them out of poverty and into higher income levels. Also, too, with indigenous communities, too, I think we should be involved with there as what because I've shared many times in the House, as indigenous person, being indigenous, you're associated with poverty. So I think our voices are crucial and needed for those conversations. And also, too, our Oscar's Place homeless shelter, I'm pretty sure we would love to be—you know, our voices involved with that; Manitoba Housing, as well. So with all due respect, as a MLA for The Pas, I would love to have The Pas and Flin Flon, you know, included in your travel plans, so our constituents, those Manitobans' voices, can be included as well.

Mr. Fielding: I don't have a problem at all with that. I think we can incorporate those into our travel plans and our consultation. I think that's a great idea.

Mrs. Smith: Will the minister be meeting with any mental health or addiction advocates?

Mr. Fielding: I'm going to refer back to the list that I tabled because I know there was the—I know there was a mental—I think it was the Canadian—*[interjection]* Okay, it is being photocopied. So I'll refer to the list that I presented. There was some groups that dealt with mental health illness in a variety of ways. If there's other organizations, I'm sure we can put that on the list for consultation purposes as we go forward. But, again, I'll refer to the list that I tabled.

Mrs. Smith: There was a video that was put out by the Lord Selkirk residents, and it was Jim Silver who produced it with community. I'm wondering if the minister would consider meeting with that group of people and looking at what they did to enhance their community. Many had jobs; many went back to school; you know, there was daycare accessible. I think it's a great model, and I think it would be, you know, of benefit for the minister to meet with that group of people.

Mr. Fielding: Sure. I'll even raise it. Probably we can have the group that's doing a lot of the consultation that's a part of it. But if they want an individual meeting, I would clear my schedule to make room for them to meet.

Mrs. Smith: Miiigwech.

Will the minister tell us what his government's timeline is in terms of concluding the consultations, the online surveys and then announcing this new strategy?

Mr. Fielding: Early in 2018.

Mrs. Smith: Does the minister believe an online survey is more urgent—urgently needed than investment in the poverty indicators outlined in the poverty—or All Aboard strategy?

Mr. Fielding: Well, I think that there is too many indicators. I mean, some of the indicators that were part of the existing strategy I thought were too broad, and really, the—you know, I generally think that there is too many categories, that we're trying to do too much. So I think you need to streamline the amount of indicators that was out there.

One thing that we are committed to doing is measurement and target. And I think that's a lot—if you talk to a lot of the poverty reduction advocates, that they're saying potentially that was left—that

wasn't part of the last strategy, that was maybe a missing piece.

And if you're—and this—the first part of the question I think you had asked is, do I think that the online survey is a part of it. I think any way we can get consultation from Manitobans—there's sometimes, I know, even in my own constituency, you know, you'll go around, and maybe it's to a seniors' home, they may not be as savvy on terms of the technical aspect of things, you know, Twitter and Facebook and that sort. So sometimes it's better to kind of go in person and talk to those individuals. Some people like online, maybe—probably younger people may like online, and some surveys, that's a part of it. So we try to do kind of a good mix of a number of different consultation methods to really understand Manitobans. And what we thought was really important is that we think that visiting with real people that are experiencing poverty is a really—real key focus to moving forward with an effective strategy.

Ms. Lathlin: This question is a—my next one is quite lengthy. So the campaign 200 report says accessible, high-quality public services are needed to reduce family poverty in four key areas, which are early learning and child care, social and affordable housing, public transportation and health care.

So how has the minister worked with this government to improve access to these areas for low-income Manitobans?

Mr. Fielding: You know what, I'll—I'm catching the—okay, the first part was early learning and child care. So I would suggest that, you know, there is—it's exciting times with early learning and child care, as well, right, where there's additional investments that are coming with the federal government. So there is going to be upwards of \$15 million annually, at least for the first three-year tranche of the money, to make investments.

Right now, as a government, we've invested close to \$170 million on an annual basis for child-care centres, and we really want to take a real balanced approach to child care. We think that, you know, you can have choice with individuals. We think that, obviously, facilities is something that generates a lot of spaces. We think that things like home child care is important. We think that school-based child care is also important. So we want a balanced approach, and I think we've made some headway in terms of creating some spaces that are there, and we're excited to partner with the

federal government on terms of creating some more child-care spaces, as we move forward, and so it is exciting times.

In terms of housing—I think that was your second topic—we think we've made some pretty substantial investments in housing. Again, I think I've indicated kind of—some of the numbers in terms of what we built, in terms of what is ongoing—or an ongoing basis. I think we've also identified there's about 2,200 more people that are a part of the Rent Assist program and sometimes it gets broken down; you get in this argument of, you know, whether government should build it or the profit or non-profit centre should build the housing. And, if you do look at the amount of housing that you could have, I think on average they say that Rent Assist program provides about \$3,600 in subsidy for an individual. To build a—you know—corrected if this stat is wrong, but I think to build—you know, let's say the government decides to build Manitoba Housing, which we are, we're still doing. It takes upwards—as I understand, around \$23,000 on a yearly basis to build it and also maintain it.

So my point with this is if you are looking at a portable housing shelter with what the federal government is doing and what we've done with Rent Assist, you can help out probably about—I'd say about seven times more people by a program where it's a portable-shelter benefit than you can by just exclusively building Manitoba Housing building of the units. And the benefit of a portable-shelter benefit, which we think is part of that kind of a balanced approach to it, is the fact that you get it right away, right. To build a Manitoba Housing unit sometimes will take a year; sometimes it'll take longer than that. So you can get a benefit—people—there's probably about seven times more people you can cover and provide a support to. They get the subsidy, they get a choice of where they want to live, and they're able to get it a lot quicker than just building it. So I think we've tried to take balanced approach. I've gone through the numbers in terms of what we are currently building, and we're excited to work with the federal government.

I don't remember your final two points.

An Honourable Member: Public transportation and health care.

Mr. Fielding: Okay. Public transportation is something—and I can speak a little bit with authority from that. I chaired—I was on City Council; I chaired the finance—the budget for six budgets, so I can say

that we are making substantial investments in public transit. I would suggest to you that right now Manitoba, Winnipeg, gets a very good deal when it comes to operating of a transit service. We've also made investments—and, to be fair, this is—your government initiated this, the rapid transit system, where there's close to \$450 million of investments in transit for the City of Winnipeg; that was part of it. So I would suggest that there is substantial amounts of money that are part of the transit system.

I would also recognize the fact, from the City's point of view, and I can speak a little bit more of this on Thursday, but, in the current transit system, if you look at the City's budgets, for instance, the City is right now looking to be—have a surplus. So I guess where I'm going with this is the City is going to have a surplus. I would argue the City will probably have a \$6-million surplus by year end, when you look at their financials and where they're going. That's above and beyond a \$9.5-million pickup that they need to pick up from the year prior. So my point is they're going to have a fairly good surplus, and so my point with that is that you should probably use your surplus before there is also some asks in terms of funding transit that'd be part of it.

* (18:40)

I would also suggest, if you look at page 37 of the City of Winnipeg's budget, where you look at the reserves, they've actually picked up close—they're stashing away close to \$30 million more in their reserves than they did last year. So my point with all this is, I think that there is substantial money with the City, and we still want to partner in—or, rather, in transit. We haven't cut that service, but we have frozen the 50-50 funding process going forward. It's a fact.

Mrs. Smith: You talked about there being too many indicators in the All Aboard strategy. Can you tell me which ones you would eliminate and which ones you would keep?

Mr. Fielding: I'll be able to tell you that after we do the consultations to Manitobans.

Mrs. Smith: Is the minister looking at other jurisdictions for alternative indicators—like, examples, which ones?

Mr. Fielding: Well, we want to, No. 1, listen to Manitobans and see what they have to say to have a robust strategy going forward. I think what also we want—and, of course, we're going to look at other jurisdictions. We also want to look at what the

federal government is doing in terms of their poverty reduction. So they have some different levers. And that—when I say, kind of, alignment with the federal government's strategy, the federal government has their own levers. And I'll say, you know, they can use, for instance, the tax code. They can use Stats Canada. They can use a whole host of things that, kind of, is in their jurisdiction.

So I think if there's going to be substantial investments—and one thing you can suggest of the Liberal government is they have made some investments in the social service side of the equation and so I don't doubt that there will be some more investments in the poverty reduction. So, if there is going to be more additional dollars coming from Ottawa, I would suggest that, you know, what we should be doing is aligning with the federal government in terms of their approach going forward.

Some examples of poverty reduction targets in—or, rather, across the country, in New Brunswick, for instance, you know, they've—New Brunswick, Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Edmonton, are areas that we have looked at what they're doing in other jurisdictions.

So the long—short answer is yes.

Ms. Lathlin: How many times has the committee on poverty reduction and social inclusion met in 2017, and who are its members?

Mr. Fielding: We have met four times, and I will yield for one minute just to give you the committee members.

Okay, in—on October 17, 2017, the Poverty Reduction Committee was reappointed by the order-in-council. Members included the three—three included ministers of three—sorry—ministers and three community members: myself, being the Minister of Families, Minister Wishart from Minister of Education and Training, Minister Clarke from Indigenous and Northern Relations, Minister Pedersen of Growth, Enterprise and Trade and Minister Squires from Sustainable Development and Francophone Affairs and Status of Women, also Reverend Dr. Stanley McKay and Mrs. Zully—I'm going to pronounce her name wrong—Trujillo and Dr. Jennie Wastesicoot—committee members.

Ms. Lathlin: In continuation with that question, will the minister commit to retaining this community and—in any future strategy?

Mr. Fielding: We are consulting with Manitobans. So we want a process that's robust going forward. So we're committed to having an effective poverty reduction strategy. And so once we consult with Manitobans, we'll know a little bit more in terms of the directions, in terms of the targets, in terms of some of the measurement that's a part of it, and how is best to align things.

One area that I've had—that I would like to see a change—I'll just put this on the record right now—is the way the process was set up before is we generally have meetings in my office at the Legislature. What I would like to commit to doing is having meetings in the community—people that have lived poverty in so many different ways, and maybe it's touring Siloam Mission, having a meeting there. Maybe it's going to different regions of the province and viewing individuals and how they're doing and what areas looks like as opposed to just having meetings, which was normal process when we came into office of, you know, having five or six people meet in, kind of, my—the minister's office to discuss these things.

So those are kind of the broad strokes of where I'd like to go. But, to be fair, until we conclude that consultation process, I'm not in a position to commit to anything beyond the fact that we'll be doing something special, something 'effective'—impactful that will measure poverty and will provide real targets where we can measure how effective we've been.

Ms. Lathlin: In March 2017, the University College of the North, which I'm pretty much—all of you know it's very dear to my heart, my former workplace, my community I love to visit every time I'm home, UCN and the four CFS authorities signed an MOU establishing the student care tuition waiver. Under the MOU, UCN will offer tuition waivers in each academic year to up to five students who are, or will be extended in care, or former youth in care not eligible for an extension of care.

In its inaugural year, two students will be supported through this program. Can you provide an update if this has increased?

Mr. Fielding: Maybe what I will do—I'll put a few comments on the record with that, and then I'll yield to the Minister of Education on that.

I—first of all I think it's a fabulous program, the tuition waiver program. It makes a lot of sense for individuals that are in the child-welfare system that

need some opportunities that's there. So maybe I'll yield to the Minister of Education, if you want to—

Mr. Chairperson: Sure. Just, if I may, just before we do that, I'm just going to get you to move your book just a little bit off of your microphone. Perfect. Thank you very much. And we'll go to Minister Wishart.

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): Thank you very much, and I appreciate the question. I know we're always looking for ways to improve the outcomes for children that have been in care, and the tuition waiver's a great way to do that.

I'd have to get back to you as to the current status on this year at UCN, but I know that last year it was fully subscribed and other jurisdictions as well. And just to add to that, we're also rolling out programs in the trades and training area that is specific to children in care to give them access to areas where they did not have that option before.

Mrs. Smith: In the minister's opinion, what are the potential impacts of the Province's public sector wage freeze, the minimum wage freeze, on family poverty?

Mr. Fielding: Well, I think it's the way you look at things. I think one area that, you know, we have talked about is looking at things, the amount of money that individuals—keeping the money in the pockets for Manitobans. So I'll point to maybe a couple things right off the bat.

The basic personal exemption. We committed to that during our election cycle and we're fulfilling that: increasing the basic personal exemption. So 2,100 low-income Manitobans actually aren't even on the payroll anymore. So we think that affordability piece is something that makes some sense.

We're also very proud of the fact that some initiatives that we've done in terms of things like the Rent Assist program, where there's close to 2,200 more individuals that are supported. Also the fact that we didn't claw back benefits when they were changed at the federal government level in terms of the child—the Canadian child benefit. That was part of it.

So a part of that, we think, makes some sense. There, of course, has been some changes to the minimum wage, of course, that our government has talked about that we think will all be a part of that

package where we think we'll offer affordability and more incentives as well as some job training initiatives that we think are important to get people a job. And, if you can get people a job, you're going to pull them out of poverty, which we think is important.

* (18:50)

Mrs. Smith: Well, 15 cents, three nickels, is not going to get people out of poverty. We—that's not enough to, you know, feed a family of three. If you have one person working, you don't have a two-person income.

My question is: What are the impacts of the cuts to the women's centres in Point Douglas? There's the North End Women's Centre, there's the North Point Douglas Women's Centre that saw \$120,000 cut from their programming that service families in that area. I've had so many families that have contacted my office because they've cut back hours, they've cut back services that they can provide to families. They recently had a leak in the roof that they couldn't fix, where their donations came in. They weren't even able to fix that, which meant, you know, families that access those kinds of services, those types of services, really had nowhere to go because every other centre in the North End of the city has been—has seen cuts to their funding which has mean—which means that their services have been scaled back.

Mr. Fielding: Well, thank you for the comments.

I would point to the budget, and sometimes the best way to view, you know, government's priority is to look at the budgets. And last year, in our budget alone, the budget for the Families Department, which for the most part takes into consideration vulnerable Manitobans, increased by about \$105 million, which is actually about a 5.6 per cent increase over previous years. And the budget prior to that, we increased our budget to the Department of Families by over \$140 million, which represented about a 10 per cent increase.

So I guess my point with that is that there's substantially more money that's being invested in vulnerable Manitobans under this government, and so we're very proud of those commitments, and whether that's in a number of programs and services across the boards, whether it be child welfare, whether it be things—child care—whether it be a whole number of different areas, there is substantial amounts of money that are being invested in these areas for individuals.

Mrs. Smith: I just want to tell you that those programs make a difference. Because women that are experiencing domestic violence or they're at places in their life where they need to go and talk to someone and get that support in terms of even educational support and sitting down with someone and hearing, you know, how do I get myself a safe place to live, you know, I'm going through some relationship problems right now and I need someone to talk to because I need somewhere to go so that I can leave this relationship but I don't know how or who or what to do. These programs and these people who were servicing them were front-line workers, were actually making a difference in people's lives. Many of those women that were there were—that became staff members were actually women who went and sought support from those services, became board members and actually became staff members and went on to education and, you know, made a difference in their life.

So, you know, I would urge you to relook at those programs because they are helping people get out of poverty. They are making a difference. And it's not just going in there to, you know, use a computer. It's about investing and creating community and having a safe place for families to go—not just women, but children, fathers, grandmothers. You know, this—these places are community hubs for families that have been there for decades, that have helped so many people, including myself and many others. So I'd urge you to relook at that and, you know, sit down with those community organizations and actually hear, you know, the stories and how detrimental it's been to the community to have those programs cut.

So my question is, how has the government cuts to prevention programs negatively impacted the four pillars of the All Aboard report?

Mr. Fielding: Well, just—you know, I just don't, you know, in the—don't want to let comments just pass on that occasion. I can tell you with family violence and prevention, I was actually—this certainly wasn't me, this is our department that put this together in partnerships with family shelter—family—some of the—that's funded through the Family Violence Prevention for Nova House, where there was upwards of 15 patients. We expanded their budget by over—about \$186,000, which expanded the amount of people that are able to benefit from—people that are escaping things like domestic violence; that would be part of it.

So we have made some investments in there. I can tell you, as well, a part of our partnership agreement with the federal government is we're investing upwards of \$4.3 million on fixing up a number of the shelters that are in Manitoba. I believe there's upwards about 10 shelters. There's about 35 different agencies that we fund: second stage housing and other items like that, that really support, you know, support women that are escaping domestic violence.

So I guess my point is that I would suggest that we are making those investments. We've also made investments in things like the United Way, right? And that's a partnership agreement where any monies that are raised by the United Way is partnered with the provincial government. So they're able to raise more money, then that's something that they can take to their funders and say, you know what, the money that we raise here from good people like yourself goes directly to programming; it doesn't go to administrative costs, and the government matches that. And so we increased our investments to places like the United Way that does a lot of investments and important services and supports. Some of the examples—I know the minister had made the announcement—was some of the family resource centres that we think are important investments with the United Way.

So, again, long-winded answer, but as I enter into my 11th year of politics, year elected politics, sometimes it happens with long-winded politicians, but what I'm saying to you is I think there has been substantial investments in these areas, not just to support women but to support vulnerable Manitobans.

Mrs. Smith: So these centres that are in the North End of the city that had their services cut because their budget was cut due to budgetary restraints within our government, these service families, so not just women that are in domestic, you know, violent relationships, but whole families—whole families go to these places, and now these places don't exist for these families to go and access.

So, you know, I'm happy to hear that you're making investments but, again, I urge you to go and sit down with those three shelters that are in the North End of the city that are experiencing this because you know that Point Douglas is the, you know, probably one of the highest areas that experience poverty. You talk about safe housing, that there was 120 new houses, social housing, created

there. There's so many people that are, you know, homeless, and so I'm just wondering what the minister's plan is on creating housing for LGBTTTQ folk.

Mr. Fielding: Well, I would, you know, you did mention in your preamble about housing and homelessness. We think that's a very important issue here in the province of Manitoba, and we seen the numbers dramatically gone up. So I will give you a few examples of where I think that we are making investments for those people, whether they're men or women. I'm going to lay out a few examples.

Number 1, we made an investments in some called the housing first rental subsidy program. And so, what that is, it's essentially administered by the MMF, and it provides a rental subsidy program to people that are either homelessness or, you know, in jeopardy of being homelessness; that would be a part of it. That's going to help about 48 individuals here in the province of Manitoba. That's a commitment we made over the last two years with the federal government that we think will help vulnerable Manitobans, whether you're men or women.

I think what I'd also point you to is investments that we made in Siloam Mission. Siloam Mission, of course, is building, you know, obviously, helps homelessness people, does a fantastic job. And what they did is they came to us, and they said, what we really have a problem with is in providing beds for, specifically, for some homeless women, that would part of it.

* (19:00)

And I can tell you it's difficult these days, with the limited amount of dollars that we do have, to prioritize and make funding arrangements for this. So I know the Minister of Education is, you know, has been very involved in aspects of this before, but we as a government were very proud of the fact that we were able to invest over \$3 million in Siloam Mission, which I believe is in Point Douglas, and really what that's—close to Point Douglas; I think we both could agree is a low-income area that maybe across the boundary, but I'm sure there's people. In fact, you know, at Siloam Mission doesn't just service people from there. When—the both times that I'd been there for funding announcements over the last two months, there is actually people from St. James that I had a personal connection to that came and gave a personal story of how Siloam Mission—so my point is, it's not just in low-income areas. It's in places like St. James. So a part of that program, we

have over 50 beds for individuals, women, that's going to be created. So we think we made some good investments there.

Another program that I would suggest is the RaY program. There's two kind of longer—there's kind of a—the rest and ROOM program. One is for short term and one is for long term. And that's for transition for people not just from CFS system but people are—that are going to be homelessness. There's upwards of about 27 units, if I'm not mistaken, of Manitoba Housing that is a part of it, that provides some transitional housing for men and women, to give some supports in terms of transition from people in homelessness.

And we also have made substantial investments, as I've already indicated, things like the SIF fund of \$89-million funding. And I would assume with the federal government's announced commitment to things like homelessness for, not just female but male homeless individuals, that we're going to have some additional partnerships. But until we have a little bit more details of what that formula looks like for Manitoba, we can't commit. But that funding won't start until 2019, so we've got a little bit of time to address that.

So, again, long-winded, but it kind of just—I'm passionate about what we have done for vulnerable Manitobans, and I think those are some pretty good initiatives that would be part of it. Are we getting everything right? No. But I think it's a step in the right direction.

Mrs. Smith: Will the minister tell me if he has a plan for LGBTTTQ housing?

Mr. Fielding: Well, we want a plan for all Manitobans. You know, I think right now what I can tell you is that we're engaged, the first time in about seven or eight years, a provincial housing strategy. And so we went out to Manitobans. We actually were able to visit about—or get information from about 1,500 Manitobans through our consultation process. I can reference the places that we've been and I'm sure someone will hand me a note to exact—tell you exactly where it was. But we did—rest assured, we did consult with a lot of individuals. We released fairly recently our what we've heard report on a provincial housing strategy, and a part of that—we're developing our strategy. We know the federal governments that are stepping up to the table through partnerships, through housing. So right now, without formulating the document, that is one of the items that we've heard of for housing. But we're, I would

say, some months away from having concrete actionable items.

The way the national housing strategy will work is we're negotiating right now with the federal government in terms of what that envelope will be to the Province in terms of what our partnerships will be. And then after that we will be making decisions in terms of housing solutions going forward.

Mrs. Smith: So I just want to you let you know, as the spokesperson for LGBTTTQ, I've had several people contact me that are homeless because of situations that aren't accommodating their identities. So I would urge you to meet with some of those folks that I've actually sent your way. And I think you've got a couple of emails from a couple of them. So it's—you know, please meet with them. It'll be beneficial.

So my next question is on child care. Would the minister agree with Campaign 2000, that public, affordable child care is needed to reduce poverty for low-income families?

Mr. Fielding: Well, certainly, we as a government want to create child-care solutions. We truly think that a balanced approach is the best approach. That doesn't just include home based, but we do think that home based is a part of the solution. I think if you ask the Minister of Education, he'll say that providing some schools and commitments to schools being built, that there be child-care centres as part of it, is part of the solution. I would suggest that facilities use—in fact, we've been able to announce a number of them. If you want, I can read into the record which ones we have. I know you're looking like—I can see it in your eyes that you want me to read them in, so maybe I'll just do that here, since I've got you here.

So my point is that we are looking for a balanced approach with child care, and a part of that, we're investing more dollars than any time in this province's history, close to \$170 million more in child-care support. So, for instance, for this year, you look at places like the YM—YMYCA—I'm saying it wrong. But Building Blocks on Balmoral, that's about 100 new spaces in—with Great-West Life. I was able to be at the announcement. I think it was a fantastic announcement that's there. Laugh 'N' Learn early learning and child-care centre, in Donwood, will be created this year. Little Saints—there's over 48 new spaces that are created. U of W—we were just at U of W fairly recently in the last week or so with the member from Wolseley, creating 32 spaces.

We're also places at U of M, where there is—there's actually spaces that are being created. A part of that—the student association actually contributed a lot of money, and actually—indigenous children will actually be prioritized in terms of getting some spaces with it.

So my point is I think we're taking a balanced approach. We really want to rebuild some of the home-based child-care sector that we've lost. Like, we've seen upwards of, I believe, is around 1,100 spaces that we lost over the last 10 years, which actually, you know, plays out to about 27 per cent reduction in the amount of home-based spaces. So we would like to build that capacity. We also think that private daycare is something—if you look at Manitoba, the stats, there's—we're actually about fourth lowest in terms of private child-care spaces. So my point is, and I think our government's point is, that we think that a balanced approach is there and we're willing to work with the federal government to make it more amenable.

In terms of affordability, we have the second lowest rates, parent rates, as anywhere in the country. The model that a lot of people talk about is Quebec in terms of the rates, but one thing I would like to reference from Quebec, which is actually interesting, is I believe it's upwards of almost 30 per cent of the—*[interjection]* other 40 per cent of the spots that are created in Quebec are home-based spots. Forty per cent are home-based spots from what people talk about as Quebec in terms of, you know, their commitments to child care. So a balanced approach is the best approach.

Ms. Lathlin: My question is: When does the minister plan to sign the bilateral agreement with the federal government for child-care funding?

Mr. Fielding: Our plan is with the federal minister for his review. I understand that is fairly close to being completed. Once he does sign off—we obviously can't get a cheque from him until he signs off on our plan, but we've done all our work. It's with the federal government right now, and as soon as we get indication from the federal government and we go through our process, we'll make announcements.

Ms. Lathlin: When was this submitted?

Mr. Fielding: This quarter.

An Honourable Member: Pardon me.

An Honourable Member: This quarter.

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Lathlin.

Mrs. Smith.

Mrs. Smith: Yes, this quarter is a big quarter. What is the actual date? *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Hold up, just a sec, just a sec. We've got to recognize you first, there.

To the honourable minister.

Mr. Fielding: With a lot of these things, there's obviously back and forths with the federal government. To be frank with you, the one issue that we are struggling with the federal government is in terms of the amount of money that you would carry forward. There were some parameters that were put on us that would suggest that you could only carry 50 per cent of the child-care funding forward in the first year and 10 per cent in the second year. Our concerns with that is that we don't want to leave any money on the table.

So that was a major negotiation point that we've ironed out with the federal government, and we submitted the plan over the last number of months, and we are hopeful that the federal government will be signing that and we'll be able to create child-care spaces. Once that happens, I can guarantee that the government will be more than interested in addressing the money. Money will not lapse because of this. There is some parameters, if agreement is signed, that you are able to carry money over from this year to next year.

Ms. Lathlin: In terms of being a resident in northern Manitoba, as a former employment consultant with Employment Manitoba, one of the biggest barriers was to—when we would establish plans for our clients to move from EI to—into training programs or to move away from EIA into training and education or jobs. Child care was the biggest barrier as to why these plans would fail or not go through.

So, again, I'm going to reiterate this question: Would the minister agree that with Campaign 2000, that public, affordable—public, affordable—child care is needed to reduce poverty for low-income families in northern Manitoba? And can you please provide an update?

* (19:10)

And I also want to put on record, too, for the 45 spaces for reaching out to our folks in The Pas, I appreciate that. We do now have—45 families and students are able to continue working and going to school. So now I want to know: Those

announcements that you have had, are there going to be any more child-care spaces in northern Manitoba?

Mr. Fielding: Well, I can tell you that the—what I can tell you is the federal government has put parameters upon—there're strings attached, essentially, with the money that they are going to be partnering with the Province from. They—a lot have to do with underserved areas. A lot have to do with low-income areas. A lot have to do with items such as off-hours, like, you know, if people are working shift work, that would be a part of it.

There is also a stream of money that is being negotiated with indigenous communities in terms of child-care parameters with indigenous organizations that—we're hoping to get more information from the federal government—will not be—and we would like that to be, but it's not part of the bilateral agreement that will be signed with the Province and the feds. The feds have identified that they'll be working with indigenous communities to come up with indigenous child-care needs. Of course, our—the federal government is responsible for child-care needs on reserve. The Province, obviously, is responsible for off-reserve child care.

So I'm not sure if that answers your question, but, really, it depends on the parameters that the federal government have put forward. And, again, once we sign the agreement with the feds, then I think there will be quite a bit of funding not just for northern communities, but for communities across Manitoba.

Ms. Lathlin: I wonder if you could just correct this rumour, but I thought Thompson was facing some child-care-spots check. If that could be corrected, that would be greatly appreciated.

And also, too, like, my question is, again, are there going to be additional spaces for our families in The Pas, other surrounding areas, Thompson, Flin Flon, so we can continue supporting our families to reach their goals to access training and education and work?

Mr. Fielding: The short answer is yes. The reason we have put out, very recently, over the last two months, an RFP—so we identified about \$2.8 million in our budget process for something called the community capital grants program—saying it wrong, but essentially, what it is, is the government puts out an RFP. We ask for proposals to come in. I think we got about 26 proposals. I don't have how many were

from Thompson, other regions, but there is some from outside of Winnipeg.

And really what that does is, the government will provide capital start-up grants—start-up in terms of capital contributions to the tune of 40 per cent of the cost of the initial project. So that could mean upwards of \$600,000 of a capital commitment to a child-care project. And then we obviously commit to the subsidization of those spaces as we go forward.

So that RFP has closed. I believe it closed over the last three weeks, sometime this quarter. I know I got the member from Fort Rouge like that. But it closed very recently, and what we'll be doing is making decisions on this 2.6–\$2.8 million of funding for our community capital. So, to a certain extent, you know, we encouraged a number of child-care centres across the province to apply for that, and again, we got upwards of 26 different applications for it.

I do truly believe that with the money that will be—partnership agreement that the Province and the feds will come up with, that there will be additional—there will be money for underserved communities. And I would suggest that Thompson and The Pas and regions like that would be something that would be part of that, and I would also encourage you to talk to any groups that there's indigenous organizations that want to apply for some funding, that will be a part of the federal dollars outside of the agreement that we have with them. The feds have set aside some money. So the short answer is yes.

Mrs. Smith: Can the minister tell us how much has been raised through the private donation, to date, for the MSBI?

Mr. Fielding: I don't have that information.

Mr. Wishart: We are getting regular updates from the post-secondary institutions. We do not have a final number for this quarter or month by month, but as they have said, and I have said in the House as well, they traditionally get the vast majority of their donations in the last quarter of the year or the first quarter of next year. So they've certainly shared with us that things are going well and that they're beyond where they have been historically at this date, but to put a absolute number on it, no, I cannot.

Mrs. Smith: Wonder if the minister would give me the last number that he had.

Mr. Wishart: Going by memory alone, would be back to September, and that was only partial, only

some institutions, and that was the 1.8 number that you guys, I think—I don't know, actually, who did a freedom of information request but someone did. And that was the last one.

Mrs. Smith: When does the minister plan to introduce a provincial housing plan, and how will be—integrated with the federal plan?

Mr. Fielding: Right, so I'll just walk through the process for the federal housing strategy. The federal government obviously introduced their plan. We have had consultations. We—back, I believe it was in the third—actually first quarter of this year, this fiscal year, that we had met with all the ministers from across the country and signed on to a overarching—I don't know if I'll call it an agreement, but it was a vision document going forward.

So right now, the federal government has been negotiating with us on what we'll say is a national housing strategy. So there's really two streams of funding: One would be an extension of essentially the investments in affordable housing that was a fund where the province and feds kind of match up dollars, somewhere around \$10 million from the federal level; provincially, around the same amount over a number of years, and so that window of funding would go out for nine years. That's the part of the agreement.

There is also items in terms of the expiring of the operating agreements for housing, and that is something the federal government committed to in their Throne Speech, so that will be addressed on there.

Now, with that being said, we haven't got the formulas from the federal government in terms of what the funding would be, and that's important, because we want to make sure that we're getting as much money as we can. I believe it was in the neighbourhood of 4.25, what we got over the last investments in affordable housing, so we want to make sure we're getting the most amount of money that we can as a province for Manitoba.

We anticipate that there is—in fact, I believe there is a federal-provincial ministers meeting that will happen in January, and, essentially, that is when the federal government will essentially give us our envelope and we need to either sign on or not, as a provincial government. And once that does happen, a framework would be established, and we would next sign a bilateral—we would next negotiate on a bilateral agreement which would happen sometime,

in 2018, in terms of the federal-provincial housing partnerships with the federal government going forward.

Mrs. Smith: I met with a few social enterprise groups, and I've heard that they were asked to scale back their budget 15 per cent.

Can you please speak to that?

Mr. Fielding: Well, I can say that we're very—I can say we are very committed to social enterprise. I think it's fabulous, some of the work that has been done. In fact, I would suggest that Manitoba Housing is—has been—and I don't think anyone would disagree, has been a leader in this area.

What we'd like to see is a bit more of an expansion of that, and we alluded to some of that in our Throne Speech, of combining a whole bunch of different areas. But we think that it makes a lot of sense if you're able to build capacity with individuals, you're able to do a number of jobs that can get the skills for people to have the long-term jobs. So we are very much committed to it.

I can't comment on the budget process going forward, because that is the budget process. If I make a commitment now and that doesn't—the money isn't there, or maybe it's even more than what we thought, then that's something you'll come back to me at this meeting. So that process is ongoing, and I'll refer that to the budget process.

Mrs. Smith: I just want to put on the record that if we're going to invest in social enterprise, we have to actually invest with dollars. We can't commit to it without putting some actual money into those centres so that they can train the people so that they can get out of poverty. But that's not my question.

The federal plan is based in part on Rent Assist and its unique portability feature. Does the minister plan to eliminate this feature and tie Rent Assist to buildings instead of tenants?

Mr. Fielding: Well, first of all, I just want to put on the record that with social enterprise, I guess, and maybe this is a question back to you, is so what level? I mean, at what level do you add on? Like, you're normally doing a—and, again, we've done a lot of this work in housing, so we've got a lot of experience in that and, to be fair, your government did a lot of that before our government as well. So I don't think there is—I think that's a good thing.

* (19:20)

But there is a marker. I mean, maybe you can suggest of what marker of an upcharge you would suggest is appropriate for social enterprise when you're looking to pure—to procure services to build a building or to retrofit or to make improvements to it. So I'd love to hear your thoughts on that.

And the second question was—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Mrs. Smith? Go ahead. Sorry, Mrs. Smith, do you want to repeat that for us, please?

Mrs. Smith: If the Rent Assist is portable or it's tied to a building.

Mr. Fielding: So I like the—I, as the minister—but, again, need to go through our processes. I do like a portable shelter benefit. And it's the reasons why I identified before. Number 1, I think you get choice, right? You get a choice in where you're going to.

I think the second part of it is, you know, the quickness of speed. So right now, if you're looking to build—the government's looking to build a Manitoba Housing unit with a building, sometimes it takes a year and a half, two years, before—you maybe go through a zoning process, it takes longer. We're able to provide the supports and services to those individuals in a timely fashion. So you get choice, you get speed in terms of getting a support to someone that is in need for low-income individuals.

And the third part of it that I think is relevant is you can have more of an impact. Just the numbers which I used—again, I use a \$3,600 parameter in terms of what an average Rent Assist individual would get versus spending when you build a building and you have the operating costs that are part of it, could be upwards of \$23,000 a year. What I would suggest is that you probably can help out seven times—and that's just me using math. It really—you know, different projects would be different, so it's not always going to be that exact formula. But if you just do the logical math with it, you should be able to help out six or seven times more people with the same amount of money.

And the final part, which is a really important piece, is the deferred maintenance on some of these costs for the Manitoba Housing. Like, right now, we have close to \$500 million in deferred maintenance, you know, of buildings that we need to essentially fix up. If you have a portable benefit or shelter, that means the government will not have to spend long-term money to fix these houses up.

So I guess my point is I very much like the portable shelter benefit, but the question is with the federal government is where they're going to get that money. Are they going to get that from the investments in affordable housing dollars, that we have a partnership agreement with them which means there'd be less bills part of it? That's the million-dollar—that's the—

An Honourable Member: It's probably a billion-dollar question.

Mr. Fielding: Exactly. So I hope that answers your question, but I'm a big supporter of the portable shelter benefit.

Mrs. Smith: So back to your comment about social enterprise. What would I do if I were—we were in government? I would invest by—social enterprises don't actually want money. They don't want dollars from the government. What they want is a commitment that 5 to 10 per cent of the projects that come out of the government are given to the social enterprises. They train the people, they get them in the workforce. You know, the dollars don't come from the government. They come from the projects. So just my—what I think would be a reasonable thing to do. You're going to get a lot more people out of poverty and you won't have to invest any money.

All right, so back to the questions: So is the minister planning to increase Rent Assist again next year?

Mr. Fielding: Well, we increased the budget by \$39 million last year, so if you look at the trends, what you do in a budgeting process is you look at where your projections are in terms of growth of where the sectors are. So I can't prejudge the budget process that's going underway, but if you look at the example from last year, we increased the budget by over \$39 million.

Mrs. Smith: Will the department be working with social enterprises to continue to repair and renovate the existing social housing stock?

Mr. Fielding: Well, we do a lot of work through MHRC right now on social housing. A lot of the work—and I'll give you an example of where I think they should expand. They'll do a lot of, you know, fixing toilets and all that sorts that would be part of it. What I would like to see them do is expand a little bit in terms of the types of work that they can do. And then I think they can be—there obviously could be more work that happens for them.

And just to your further point that—what I was talking about is the upcharge for it, is on average, it does cost more for the social enterprise. Now, what we've seen is that every dollar invested in social enterprise, you will see about a \$4 return on investment, I would suggest. And if you can get, you know, people that are in the work world getting the skills, then they can transfer that skills into something else. So we—don't get me wrong. We're very supportive of that. And I'd like to see the skill—the skills move out past just the initial training of it, and that's something that I think we can do. I think that's a large reason why in our Throne Speech, we identified areas like social enterprise and a whole number of different areas to look at with Healthy Child. You know, it's where services and supports that can be done.

So, you know, our government is—you know, we truly believe in kind of a hand up as opposed to handout. And we're proud of the fact, even on EIA types of rules, we've seen actually some pretty positive trends, not just because of the employment numbers are going down, but things like providing people getting into—getting people into the work world, like, Jobs On Market. Again, it's like a rapid centre—employment centre for people that are closest to the work field. Through the general assistance category, we're able to get them jobs quickly. Again, the REDI program, through education for refugees; it's able to provide a job for those individuals, and that's a part of the element of an important endeavour to get people out of poverty, is when you provide them with a job, and that's a key element of it. And we talked about that—not quite a bit just in the campaign, but we truly think that if you're providing meaningful work to individuals, that will be something will be meaningful and be impactful and will get more people out of poverty.

Mrs. Smith: Sorry, falling asleep, here. Miigwech, Chair.

Will the minister provide how many children are currently in care—the numbers?

Mr. Fielding: Right now, our figures show there's upwards of 11,000 children in care.

Mrs. Smith: Will the minister tell us how the department has changed the way that they are counting kids in care?

Mr. Fielding: Well, I can tell you that we have taken a comprehensive approach to children in care. There is about 10,700 children in care that are affiliated—

that aren't—that I'll say that the government are not providing any subsidy. There is a number of children that are actually at home that aren't provided any subsidy by the government. That's part of it. In fact, we've seen substantial increase over the last number of years of the children that be—have been reunited with their parents. And something that we're extremely proud of is a partnership agreement that we introduced with organization called Ma Mawi—you're probably—I'm sure you're familiar with it—and The Winnipeg Foundation. And it's something called Family Group Conferencing. And that's a part of our big reform plan that we're talking about in the child-welfare area.

So we truly think that, No. 1, you need to try and reunite parents with their kids, with their children. And that's not happening as much as it should today. We would like to make a change, and the evidence—this is a real evidence-based initiative where Family Group Conferencing—that's where all family members are together with their families to develop kind of a care plan—it's actually showed that upwards about 70 per cent or even higher amount of people are reunited with their children, essentially, which I think is the No. 1 goal. But the government has also said a part of our reform plan is if you're not able to reunite your children because of safety reasons, then what we really need to develop is permanent lifelong connections. And, when I talk about lifelong connections and permanence, what we truly think is that there should be more legal guardians in the province. If you look at the numbers in Manitoba, we had about 43 applications for legal guardians here in the province. A province like Alberta, even though they're three times the size of us, they actually have, I think it's—and forgive my numbers; I'm saying this on the top of my head—but they have about four to five thousand children in care, so a lot less than we have as a province. Yet they have upwards of, I believe, it's about five times as amount of legal guardians.

And the reasons why we would want to move towards this—and I just want to preference the fact that when you have a legal guardian, it's actually the courts that make the decision on it. We would like to ensure that indigenous culture is a part of any process, going forward, in terms of providing supports for lifelong commitments. We also want to work with indigenous communities to build the capacity of indigenous foster parents. But what the evidence clearly suggests—again, if you're not able to reunite parents because of safety reasons with the

individuals, then providing lifelong connections to them; it's something like the attachment and people that were fortunate enough to have a real supportive person and some sort of attachment in your life. The evidence is just overwhelming that the outcomes are very—much better.

And so, really, that's what this government is focusing in on in the child welfare: reuniting with your parents, when safety reasons and through some of the programs and policies that we identified, and the other piece is ensuring that you have lifelong commitments.

* (19:30)

The third element, since you brought up child welfare, is changing the funding process. What we heard extensively from a lot of the agencies in the child-welfare area is that there's not enough flexibility in terms of the funding. The way they're funded right now is through the amount of children in care and the days in care. That's how they're funded. So what they've told us exclusively is that if you give us more flexibility in terms of the funding sources, that we can—we'll be able to invest in things like early intervention and prevention that would really make a difference to it. So we've moved towards a block funding model where the 26 different agencies that deal in the child-welfare area will have some flexibility, and so that will allow them to invest in early intervention and prevention. That's the third element of our plan.

The fourth is having a legislative review of the whole CFS act and the authorities act and really what we want to do with that is go out to Manitobans and find out how we can change the whole CFS act in particular as well as the authorities act, and the one or two big things that I want to focus in on is some of the thresholds. Right now, Manitoba—when I mean thresholds, I mean it's the ability of someone to take a child into care. There's not clarity in terms of those thresholds of saying when a child will be taken in care. So, if you're able to provide some clarity and move towards more of a system of safety as opposed to risk, that should clarify and should take into consideration that taking a child into care should be the last process, and that's something that Manitoba's far behind on. So we want to focus in a number of different areas.

I can talk all night about this. I know Bob—or, the member from Dawson Trail is very passionate and is a foster parent in this area. So—

Mr. Chairperson: Mrs. Smith.

Mrs. Smith: I want to tell you, as someone who's worked in the child-welfare system for 12 years, worked at Marymount, was also a child in care growing up, the only thing I wanted—and also the member from St. Johns also talked about this as well—is at the end of the day, no matter how much abuse you face at the hands of your parents, that's the only place you want to be. So, when I hear you talk about putting supports in place for families to be able to do—to have reunification, you know, I'm hopeful. I'm happy that you're moving in that direction, definitely.

I will caution you, however, that there are 63 First Nations communities in Manitoba and that if you are to do extensive consultation and—you know, that you include them, because we know that 80, probably upwards to 90 per cent of the kids in care are indigenous, and we need to work at putting supports in place so that kids can be at home with their families, and when we look at safety—I mean, my parent was a good parent. My mom was in residential school. She wasn't the best parent, but she loved us. I was the one who took off from home. I was the one that put myself in situations that—you know, my mom wanted to keep me safe. So what I'm saying to you is that you don't want to create a place where you're apologizing to these children in 30 years because you've put them in a permanent situation.

And I hear people talk about kids being in foster care, you know, 20 placements. Well, you know, sometimes those placements don't work out, and as a teacher I had so many kids that disclosed to me about abuses that they were sustaining while in these homes. I watched kids come to school with inadequate clothing, and I'm not saying every foster parent is like that, because I know you're a good foster parent. There's tons of great foster parents out there.

I want to preface the work that Seven Oaks School Division is doing in terms of family conferencing. I mean, we were doing that back in the early 2000s when I worked at Marymount, when I worked at Seven Oaks School Division. When we had parent conferences, it was a foster parent, and if the biological parent could be there, we always had the biological parent there. We had cultural nights where we would bring the bio-parents as well the foster parents together in culture, and not just sharing indigenous culture, but all culture, so that we could

start to look at all of the similarities we have rather than the differences, because that's what divides us. You know, looking at, you know, an indigenous person, for instance, I mean, you saw it in the news in Saskatchewan. You walk into a store, you're followed. That's true. I mean, I'm pretty light. I still get followed in a store. I walk into a store with my daughter, someone's following me.

I worked with kids from the North that came from their northern communities, grade 10 because their schools went up to grade 9. At Maples Collegiate, tell you, we worked as Wayfinders staff; we got those kids clothed, we sat with them and did mock interviews. We got them ready to get into jobs. They went to interviews. When they could get an interview, they were never, ever hired.

So we have a lot of work to do in terms of creating an equal playing system here for people. And when we look at who's in poverty, I mean, you know it yourself, a lot of those people are indigenous and it stems from the colonial impacts of this country on indigenous people.

So if we're going to talk about, you know, poverty, if we're going to talk about real actions, if we're going to talk about moving forward and creating the space where kids can be at home, we have to start addressing the root problems, the root causes, language, language in all of Manitoba schools. Seven Oaks has started, Winnipeg School Division started, K to 3, now they've added grade 4.

You know, I didn't learn about myself as indigenous person until I was 23. You know how hard that is to grow up? Our kids are growing up like that. You're going to put kids in permanent homes where they have no idea who they are. You're going to create this other system where you're going to have kids that are going to be in jail. They're not going to get their education, because they're going to be falling into other systems. You have to start building identity. And I'm also passionate about this. I mean I got into working with kids because I was a kid that worked in that—that went through that system. I became an educator because I did not see one indigenous person all of K to 12 reflective of me.

So, when we're talking about moving forward, you have to start looking at what are some of these issues with these kids and why are they in care in the first place? What do these parents need and how do we get them the supports they need?

So I'm going to leave it to Jon.

Mr. Fielding: Sure, no, I'll just respond quickly to this and I can speak of this all night; I'm very passionate about this and, you know, to be fair I—I—you know, in my time in government I, you know, city and—I've taken on some pretty big roles, as chair of finance, as chair of the police board. This is a very—this is going to be the toughest challenge not just that I have, that the province has in terms of addressing. And, you know I truly think—I—I'm—I think this is an important step and I think it's an important plan and I think you're right in some respects.

I can tell you that the legal guardianship piece that we're talking about, the only thing that we are talking about is providing supports to individuals that didn't have it. So right now if you're a guardian or—the vast majority of times these guardians are people that are a family member, a family member that's there. There is a process that's not changing. It's a core process that happens.

What we want to make sure is that indigenous culture and an understanding of history is a part of that. We think that's important. We also think that we need to build capacity with foster parents, indigenous foster parents, that are there. And we also want to provide. Like, right now if you decide to take on a lifelong commitment of a child, right, you—maybe you can afford it, maybe you can't—we just want to provide supports to allow people to do that because the outcomes are so much better when people have a lifelong connection.

And No. 1 and most important thing is reuniting with their parents. That's the most important thing. And that's why we built a number of things in, family group conferencing, other items to really address that, to make it happen. But if that's not possible, we want to build lifelong connections. And we've also introduced, suggested or highlighted the fact that we're introducing customary-care legislation, which I think will be very much—and it is embraced by the community. In fact, we've been in the community consulting with it, and that speaks to a large amount of what you're talking about with the Truth and Reconciliation, the number of recommendations that will be part of it.

That is another big component of keeping families and kids together. If you can involve the communities, the communities, the caregivers, the community in terms of developing that care plan with the same safety techniques or what have you to make sure children are safe, but you're building that

cultural customs that are maybe unique in different areas of the province, then we think that is a way where you're going to see better results for individuals' reunification with parents.

And the final point is through the EPR system. We're making some changes to the EPR system to address things like the amount of people that are in care right now. It takes upwards—once a child is apprehended—this is important so I'm going to continue to go on.

* (19:40)

So I'm not going to try and take too much time, but I'm passionate about it. So, right now, through the EPR system, when a child is apprehended, it takes upwards to 130—under 130 days before any meaningful care plan happens. It's a high-cost system that's ineffective, that costs upwards of \$650 a day for some of the shelters, less than that for some of the foster placements, and they're not getting any service and supports for upwards of 130 days.

With our plan, we're going to have a partnership agreement with the Child Protection Centre that can do that assessment within days as opposed to waiting 130 days. So we think it's important to get children out of the EPR system, get the proper supports and services in place, so they can have a care plan and, specifically, if they can get back with their parents, reunite with their parents, is the No. 1 priority. And that's what this government is all about, and we're passionate about it, and we think that it's long overdue.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): If you look on page 19 at indicator No. 10—I mean, this is the indicator which looks at, essentially, the rate of poverty, and there's actually three different ways of measuring it. And, you know, no matter which way it's been measured, there really hasn't been much in the way of progress.

So what you've told me so far in terms of what your plans are—you haven't convinced me that anything that you're going to do is to—is going to alter that line and to actually reduce poverty. So let me give you a chance to see if you can tell me something that you're going to do that's actually going to alter that line and start reducing the number of families, kids, people in poverty in Manitoba.

Mr. Fielding: Well, No. 1, I would suggest this isn't data, actually, from when we were in government, to be fair. This is data that—the last year of the NDP administration that was there. So, to be fair, we think

that you're right; the numbers that are here are—they're horrible, the numbers that we're talking about, the amount of children in care—or, rather, the amount of children living in poverty. We're the child poverty capital, really, of the world. The indigenous people that are living in poverty is—in my opinion, needs dramatic work.

And so I've identified—and I can identify them again in terms of some of the initial steps we've taken in terms of addressing poverty. Number one, right off the bat, we're making sure we have an effective plan, which we don't think was done before. Under the previous administration, there was no consultation at all under the poverty reduction plan that was identified. That is something that I even confirmed with the advocates when we have met with them.

So what we want to provide is something—a real measurement and real targets. That's what the Minister of Education and myself have committed to, which we think is important. Visit with real Manitobans, people that have lived in poverty to kind of get—to get their opinion of where we need to go from, and I think the government has taken some initial first steps.

And I'm going to just reiterate, we've changed the—you know, again, the Rent Assist budget has gone up, we think, for low-income individuals by over \$39 million in the last budget. What that means is over 2,200 more people are supported. So, yes, there has been some deductibility changes, but we'd be able to support a lot more people, over 2,200 more people. You could fill the Convention Centre up twice with the amount of people that are supported, so a lot more people are supported.

Dr. Gerrard, the member from River Heights, we've done things like the tax through the basic personal exemption—we're far behind other provinces—where over 2,100 low-income individuals aren't on the tax rolls at all, so it gives a little bit more money in their pockets.

We also, when the federal government made changes to the CCB, the Canadian child-care benefit, you know, a decision could have been made by the government to essentially claw that money back into the system, and that wasn't done because we wanted to make sure we're supporting the low-income individuals.

We've also made investments in terms of housing, a \$89-million housing deal just to begin

with over the last two years. That's made investments in things like affordable housing. It's made investments in terms of one third of the money going to fix our existing housing stock, so people have a quality-of-life area to live in not just in Manitoba Housing but also in non-profit areas.

We're negotiating with the federal government in terms of a long-term housing strategy which we think is important.

And the final piece that we think is important is getting people into the work world. Initiatives through the EIA, whether it be things like the REDI program that Minister Wishart's worked on with getting refugees meaningful jobs or things like the Jobs On Market where you have over 380 people—the files have been closed because they've been able to get in the work world, which is a rapid redeployment that's a part of it.

So I would suggest those are some concrete measures that are part of it, and once we go to Manitobans and get their opinion of how we do this, the federal government comes up with their strategy, we're going to have a strategy that's going to align with the federal government, with the provincial government, to have a comprehensive process that'll be measurable and will set targets to see how we're doing on it.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. I'm not being critical about what's happened in the past, although that's a problem, but I am concerned that you don't have a strategy which is actually going to take us in terms of lowering that number significantly.

You mentioned a number of approaches; that's true. But when I look at the population of Manitoba, which is 1.3 million approximately, we're talking about people who are below the low-income cut-off, which is approximately 10 per cent of that, and in some cases a little more depending on how you measure it, maybe up to 15 per cent with one of the index, but 10 per cent is 130,000 Manitobans.

Now, 2,200 is not completely insignificant, but in terms of being able to actually switch that curve, it's not going to do very much, right, to take it from 130,000 to 128,000, right. And even adding up all the other measures, you haven't convinced me at all that you're going to shift that curve very much.

And here we are; we're at two years after you were elected, or pretty close to it, and we don't yet have a plan that you're going to take forward as what you're looking for, I know, is a comprehensive

poverty plan, but two years is a long time when mandates are usually about four years.

So let me give you another chance to say where you're going and how you're actually going to shift that curve.

Mr. Wishart: And I appreciate the opportunity to answer that question because, though, the Minister of Families talked at some length about the initiatives that his department has done, we, too, are working in the area of education and training and a big part of success in getting out of poverty is, of course, to find that job, that first job, and we've put in place a number of programs already, particularly in the K-to-12 system. On the vocational side we have a significant upswing in the number of students that are showing interest in vocational training which provides them with job opportunities, and I know that you probably noticed the numbers that were out the other day about labour market needs up to 2022. That was 150,000 jobs, if I remember correctly. That's about 24,000 a year.

We know that we cannot get those from any other source but from training a number of our own residents, and we know that many of those are people that have been caught in poverty in the past, and so we have to break the cycle of poverty the member from Point Douglas has mentioned.

And so we're working very closely to do that, not only in the K-to-12 system, but in the labour market. We're working with a number of groups, and I can cite you dozens of examples, in all honesty, of different projects we have put together in the labour market, including one in Thompson that was just completed the other day, where we took 32 kids that probably will never complete high school, in all honesty, but trained them into the mining industry. Those kids are now all working and they're all making \$100,000-plus a year.

Those are exits from poverty, and there are a number of those that we are working at, as well, in the labour market. And, of course, the traditional K-to-12 system always leads, hopefully, into colleges and the post-secondary education system, and the Manitoba Scholarship and Bursary Initiative, and the Bursary Initiative have already increased the number of kids that are receiving support to move in that direction by a thousand students over last year. That's a thousand Aboriginal students. It's a significant upswing in numbers, so I know the member's expressing a concern about how do we

make this significant enough to actually deal with the size of the problem that we have inherited.

And we're well aware of that, but we are working in different departments and we work very closely together on a number of issues and this being one, especially EIA and exits from EIA to put together robust solutions that we know can scale up, and we're not there yet. There's no—you know, nobody's fooling anyone to say that, you know, a thousand is the answer. We know we have to do much more than that, but it's the cumulative total that counts and we certainly can do that in terms of the size and scale of the thing.

A good job is a solution and it's not just a solution once, but it's a solution for life. So we certainly are working jointly to make that happen.

* (19:50)

Mr. Gerrard: You've got a mandate. If you're going to make a significant difference, you need to be figuring that a minimum would be a 20 per cent reduction from 130,000 to just over 100,000. So 26,000. You're talking, you know, a small number here and a small number there.

Are you going to train an additional 26,000 people who would be low income? Is that the sort of number that you're going to achieve or not?

Mr. Wishart: Well, as I mentioned, the number that we need in terms of additional well-trained people in the workforce comes to about 24,000 per year. That doesn't mean we have to get them all in the first year or anything, but we certainly know that we have to train a lot of our own domestically produced people that are not actually finding their way into the workplace.

We have the advantage of Provincial Nominee Program, and we got a significant number of people from other countries coming as immigrants. We've become a very popular place to come as immigrants, but we know that that alone would never, ever come close to filling the number that we need.

We do have a timing issue. We're very aware of that, and that is generated more by the baby boom than any other single thing. People are aging out of the workplace, so we have somewhere like a five- to eight-year window where we have to produce those number of people. We're trying very hard to increase not only the post-secondary opportunities, but also to train by other methods.

You know, when I mentioned labour market we have the apprenticeship system which is in need of quite an overhaul, but has a great potential for a large number of people into the workplace.

And the cumulative total, you know, it's great to say we have this target number of—shall I use 25,000 a year just as a ballpark number?—but it's always one person at a time. You train that one person; it's the cumulative total that you look at, but you can never forget it's the individual you have to make fit into the labour market system, into the labour—find that first job, find that successful job, whatever it is for that individual. Many of these are very unique individuals, some of them with multiple barriers to the workplace, and that is the challenge that we have to work on, that we believe we have a process in place to do that.

I know the minister has talked a bit about how his department has been structured. Our department is structured quite differently, too, from previous ones, and it is providing us with a number of those linkages that, frankly, never existed before. I shouldn't say that, because they did exist, but they were often in different departments and they were hard to put together. Now we're all in one place.

Mr. Gerrard: In addition to bringing more people out of poverty, or having them achieve success in getting out of poverty, one of the problems right now is that there's substantial numbers of people who've been working in the health-care system who have been laid off and who cannot find jobs—health-care aides, for example. I've had people who've been looking extensively day after day for opportunities, and right now there seems to be absolutely zero that's available to them.

So, I mean, you—what are you doing about people who are being laid off by basically other measures that other departments in your government are taking?

Mr. Wishart: I know that there's change in the health-care system, and with change comes challenges and there are a number of people that are—that were in one aspect of their career and they're looking to go into the other. I know that we have at least three programs out there right now retraining people in the health-care system for the new jobs that are being created in the health-care system. So that is certainly in response to the need that you have identified. For most of them, it will be an upgrade, you know, from where they were before in terms of income potential, and that's positive.

You know, it does vary across the board. There will be new positions created as we move forward, and we want two things: We want everybody to have a good job, but we also want a system that works. So I think you know that needs—change needs to happen in the health-care system. It's never a comfortable or easy thing, but we need to get a system that works for Manitobans—all Manitobans.

Mr. Gerrard: I mean, clearly, the outcomes which, hopefully, will be measured effectively, are going to be very important in determining whether or not what you're doing is successful and be looking at those very closely.

I'm doubtful that you've got a sufficiently robust plan that will succeed in reducing poverty. But I will keep an open mind, and thank you for both being here today—both ministers.

Mr. Wishart: I'm not sure there was a question in that, but I appreciate the comment.

I know that it's a challenge for us all, and, certainly, as the—Minister Fielding has indicated, that it isn't going to be an easy thing for us. We didn't sign on because it was easy; we signed on because it needed to be done.

Mrs. Smith: Just some final comments.

I did mention that this is something that is really dear to my heart and, you know, I'd really like to work with this government and put some real measures, actions and tangible things in place so that we can get these poverty numbers down and get kids returned to their homes, and real measures.

I am disappointed, though, that, you know, this is an act, and then you've been in government 18 months, and you say that this isn't your data. So where is your data for the 20-something indicators?

Mr. Fielding: Well, if you're talking about the poverty reduction, some of the numbers have been 'bantied' about—and, in the media, they're based on numbers prior to us getting in government. I have identified that—you know, I'm not going to go through a litany of the policies and programs that we have; we've gone through that all night long here. But, again, we want to address this. We don't think that the numbers that we're seeing here are something that—you know, I think we need to make improvements on it.

So the number of the initiatives that we put forward we think will address it, and we think that a new and renewed poverty reduction strategy that's

got measurement and targets is a step in the right direction. But we, as government, need to follow policies and—policies that will help pull people out of poverty.

Mr. Chairperson: So excellent.

So, seeing no further questions, thank you all for the very streamlined conversation this evening.

So, hearing none, then, the one question we have, then, is: Shall the Annual Report of the

Manitoba Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy (All Aboard) for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2017, pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Mr. Chairperson: The report is accordingly passed.

So the hour being 7:58, committee rise.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 7:58 *p.m.*

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