

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

Chairperson
Mr. Dennis Smook
Constituency of La Verendrye

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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

Friday, December 2, 2016

TIME – 1 p.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

**CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Dennis Smook
(La Verendrye)**

**VICE-CHAIRPERSON – Mrs. Colleen Mayer
(St. Vital)**

ATTENDANCE – 11 QUORUM – 6

Members of the Committee present:

*Hon. Messrs. Fielding, Micklefield, Hon.
Ms. Squires, Hon. Mr. Wishart*

*Messrs. Allum, Curry, Meses. Fontaine,
Lamoureux, Mr. Lindsey, Mrs. Mayer,
Mr. Smook*

APPEARING:

Mr. Rob Altemeyer, MLA for Wolseley

MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

*Annual Report of the Manitoba Poverty
Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy
(ALL Aboard) for the fiscal year ending
March 31, 2015*

*Annual Report of the Manitoba Poverty
Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy
(ALL Aboard) for the fiscal year ending
March 31, 2016*

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Mr. Chairperson: Good afternoon. Will the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development please come to order.

Our first item of business is the election of a Vice-Chairperson.

Are there any nominations for this person?

I've got a mind blank—Mr. Curry.

Mr. Nic Curry (Kildonan): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and also as a side note, thank you for working with me on my campaign for many months. And I know it had a lasting impact on you.

I nominate Ms. Mayer for Vice-Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Mayer has been nominated.

Are there any other nominations?

Hearing no other nominations, Ms. Mayer is elected Vice-Chairperson.

This meeting has been called to consider the following: Annual Report of the Manitoba Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy (ALL Aboard) for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015; Annual Report of the Manitoba Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy (ALL Aboard) for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2016.

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

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I'll actually allow my colleague to go first.

Hon. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): I would like to suggest two hours or until the work of the committee is over, to be reviewed at 3 o'clock.

Ms. Fontaine: I'm good with that.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. It has been suggested that we go two hours and, if the work has still not been accomplished, we review at—it would be 3 o'clock.

Mr. Micklefield: Yes, just to clarify, two hours or until we're finished, if earlier, to be reviewed at 3 o'clock if we need to go later.

Mr. Chairperson: That's fine. That's not exactly how you worded it but I just wanted to make sure.

Mr. Micklefield: You're right.

Mr. Chairperson: Are there any suggestions as to the order in which we should consider this—the reports?

Ms. Fontaine: Global.

Mr. Chairperson: Global. It's been suggested global, then global it is.

Does the honourable minister wish to make an opening statement?

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

Well, first of all, thank you for everyone coming here today to discuss the efforts to reduce poverty in Manitoba and to promote social inclusion.

Addressing poverty is, of course, a shared responsibility for all Manitobans. However, this group is going to have a particular responsibility in considering the impact of Manitoba strategy of having a true impact on vulnerable people. Although hard and complex, the government is prepared to take on poverty reduction and social inclusion. In fact, in our first budget we indexed the basic personal exemption to inflation and decreasing the number of low-income Manitobans who pay income tax to 2,770 people off of the rolls altogether. Fully indexing benefits under the rent assist program to help low-income Manitobans living in the private market, and increasing the funding for Manitoba Housing is a multiyear capital program.

Manitoba's current approach to poverty reduction is based on some sound principles, like, poverty is multifaceted and has a multitude of reasons and causes.

Social inclusion bars Manitoba from sharing equally in our societies.

Certain groups in Manitoba face a higher risk of poverty than others. Supports and services must be accessible to those in need. Manitoba's new government is focused on building the economy and fixing the finances while at the same time repairing the services that Manitobans rely on.

I'm currently working with my Cabinet colleagues and community stakeholders in reviewing Manitoba's approach to poverty reduction. The ALL Aboard strategy is based on some strong principles, but there is room for improvement. Of the 21 indicators of 'poverty' only half have been approved since initial strategy was first developed in 2008.

I have met with community members and all of the—and, sorry, I have met with the community members of ALL Aboard Committee and began a discussion on strategy renewal. Under the act, the strategy is due for renewal in 2017, and in our recent budget in 2016, committed in future budgets for Manitoba's new government to set in place a comprehensive plan to address poverty.

To this end, committee members of the ALL Aboard Committee and I have discussed problems with 21—with the 21 indicators. Some indicators were counter to others; as high school graduation rates

improved, particularly in participation with adult learning programs worsened. Some rely on data that was too infrequently—infrequent to indicate when government should change course, and that's something like core housing needs.

Some are really inherently judgemental, like critiquing when a woman decides to start a family, and that's teen birth rates. Some are sensitive to geography as they are income—in terms of continuing of physician care, I guess, would be one that I would suggest. Some are used in the wrong way; useful information at the local level has really considered in terms of the provincial early learning development instrument. Ultimately, the indicators are too numerous, and I know how government should respond when we look at them.

* (13:10)

We also discussed the need for strategy to move forward, and sometimes when you try to do all things to all people, unintentional consequences—and you become, you know—ability to do nothing at all. So we think a more focused approach makes sense.

Manitoba is enjoying a renewal, I guess, in terms of the poverty file. In addition, Manitoba's new government and our poverty-reduction strategy being due in early 2017, the federal government is currently involved in a poverty-reduction strategy in and of itself, which we're working with them on in terms of ours.

Manitoba's keenly participating on the development of a federal strategy and is involved in helping shape what really aligns and where they interlink, I guess I would say, between the federal and provincial strategy can be.

I'll be meeting with my federal ministers responsible for social services in the new year, I believe it's February, to discuss the alleviation of poverty in Canada and how jurisdictions can work together to have better outcomes for Manitobans and Canadians.

I look forward to discussing the ALL Aboard annual reports for 2014 and '15, and '15 and '16, with you today. I'll try to answer some of the questions, but, as you may know, both these reports—our government was not in power for these particular reports. So we're in a—kind of an awkward situation where we'll be answering questions upon the previous government's work as relates to this.

I'll close my 'rewark'—my remarks by again expressing gratitude for helping govern something that's truly important for all Manitobans, enhancing our ability for people to get ahead, enhancing the quality of life for people have and to ensure that people come out of poverty in a more effective way.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the honourable minister for his statement.

Does the critic for the official opposition have an opening statement?

Ms. Fontaine: Well, I would say miigwech for convening today's committee meeting. And I think that, obviously, quite obviously, everybody around the table understands, you know, how important it is to deal in a very strategic and methodical way on, you know, a variety of different programs and services in respect of alleviating and, hopefully, eliminating poverty that families face on a daily basis. And some families actually, you know, as a result of a myriad of different things, but—and including colonization, face poverty inter-generationally.

And so I know that we can all agree around the table that there is certainly a lot of work that needs to be done on a variety of different fronts, and that I'm sure that we can all agree around the table that none of us in our capacity want to see anyone, in particular, children, you know, continue to suffer the consequences of poverty. And we know that, you know, every day in Manitoba, there are children that face, again, the consequences of poverty. And I know that, you know, the NDP had taken some concerted efforts and measures in respect of eliminating poverty.

And I think we saw—excuse me. I apologize for my throat right now. We saw some changes, including but not limited to, you know, the raise to minimum wage every year that we were in government, which had a fundamental and immediate impact on the lives of families, on single moms raising children and then, quite obviously, their children as well. I think that that's something that I'm particularly proud of, because we know that, actually, when we raise the minimum wage even by 50 cents that it puts in the pockets, you know, upwards of, you know, \$400, \$500, into the pockets of Manitobans, which, you know, then goes into securing people's, you know, housing and their food security.

Again, I say miigwech to convening this and I guess we can begin.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the member for her statement.

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Fontaine: Does the minister agree that poverty is not merely about money but also includes social exclusion?

Mr. Fielding: Well, I think poverty is something that we all need to face across the country.

We know, if you look at averages, the poverty rate in Manitoba has dramatically increased above and beyond the national average. The national average is somewhere in the range of a 9 per cent increase, and we've seen, in Manitoba, kind of a doubling of that number in the terms—in the tune of around 15 per cent increase.

So it's something that touches everyone. I'm not sure if that necessarily answers your question, but there's many different facets of poverty and reducing it. I know there's a number of indicators that are here, part of the document that was generated by the previous government. Some of the indicators are, you know, it makes sense to take a look at. Some of them I'm not really sure how relevant they are, to be quite honest with you, going forward. But I think that everything is made up on the global number overall.

Ms. Fontaine: I guess what I was asking is, you know, does the minister—again, you know, that it's not merely people's poverty and, in some cases, again, you know, the intergenerational poverty that many people face, right—it's not solely just the—a consequence of how much money people have, right? But it's predicated on, you know, variables of social inclusion.

And so my question is, does the minister agree that that is accurate? And what would he, in his opinion, believe that some of those kind of social exclusion measures, how do—what are those consequences, and how do they manifest themselves in the lives of people?

Mr. Fielding: I guess it depends on what your definition of social inclusion is, right?

I mean, we think that we've taken, as a government, a number of measures that are part of the—that go towards peoples' pocketbooks, I guess, if you will. We've reduced—or, we've enhanced the basic personal exemption. We think that's something

that's really important. We've also done things in terms of not clawing back any of the EIA—you know, any of the clawbacks from the federal government when you change the Canadian child tax 'benet'—that's our—to putting more money in the pockets.

We've also done things—I guess you could talk about social inclusion in terms of enhancements of housing. We've increased our housing budget over last year's budget by over 56 per cent, a \$42-million increase. A lot of people talk about housing is one of the key components—a building block, if you will. We've also just signed some agreements with the federal government in terms of agreements on affordable housing.

So I think there's a whole number of different areas that it can be, but it really depends on what topic and what your definition of social inclusion is.

Ms. Fontaine: So social inclusion would also include, you know, the systemic barriers that people face, right? And I know that I—I'm sure I don't need to go in great deal. I'm sure that everybody around the table would understand that some of those kind of systemic barriers would be, you know, the racism and—that people feel—or experience and feel. You know, social exclusion in respect of participation in the economy, which would include, of course, being able to access jobs.

So I, again, I'm just trying to clarify whether or not the minister—you know, as the Minister of Families (Mr. Fielding) who this falls under—whether or not the minister does understand or believe that that poverty, you know, is so multifaceted and so interconnected with a variety of different variables, right?

So one of them, like I said, is racism, and my sister-colleague talks about it quite often—about, you know, gendered violence, as well. That's a part of this social exclusion that contributes to peoples' poverty. And so, you know, that's what I'm trying to understand, if the minister sees that as well.

Mr. Fielding: Well, I guess just going back to, you know, what we are here, and I'm willing to freelance in some issues.

To a certain extent, though, we are here—just bringing it back a notch—to kind of review the ALL Aboard strategy for 2014—the annual report, as well as the 2015 and '16. So I guess the question I may have to you is, you know, what indicator are you speaking to in the documents that we're here to discuss?

* (13:20)

Ms. Fontaine: So there—I mean, I know that, at the beginning, when we talked about a global discussion, right, so a part of that global discussion, really, in respect of, then, you know, a critique or an analysis of poverty and all of the different variables that go into that, then informs your department's actions on it and strategies, so that's why I'm asking in respect of, you know, do you appreciate and understand and agree that it also includes social inclusion—or exclusion, I mean—sorry; I apologize for that, because, then again, it does, then, inform the approach that's undertaken.

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): We're kind of working together on this, as you probably appreciate. Certainly, when you talk about inclusion, our government is very supportive of—I meant our province of Manitoba, that includes everyone. I think that's obvious, and we are taking a lot of steps, actually, to reach out to, in particular, to First Nations to make sure that they're part of our economy growing forward.

And I know over in Education we have programs almost too numerous to mention that are specifically designed to try and get engagement with First Nations, even down into the early years, but in particular, in post-secondary institutions, try and get the rate of university graduates, post-secondary graduates increased. But we still are struggling and I think the member knows from the indicator that's in here with the high school graduation rates in particular for First Nations kids.

So we are in the process, actually, of designing some additional programs to try and get that engagement. The data shows us that we're actually losing them—well, almost before high school. We're losing them in the late elementary years, losing their interest, losing their engagement, and so there's little chance that they're going to move on through the high school system and graduate and be successful as part of the economy, and we want them to be successful as part of the economy here in Manitoba, so we're trying very hard to get an engagement there. Some of that will be vocational for sure, but a lot of it will be other ways to try and reach out to them with a—sort of a different structure than has been in place.

So we're working very proactively in that regard. I think, maybe, that's what the member's looking for, a little information about where we want to go.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech for that. I mean, of course I'm sure that everybody around the table understands how important education is in respect of, you know, as one piece in respect of pulling people out of poverty.

I mean, I'm not sure if I'm going to get into the whole discussion in respect of indigenous participation rates and graduation rates within high school because it is so complicated and it is—I mean it is—we could be sitting here for hours just talking about that one piece, so I do appreciate you sharing that.

I guess I just want to kind of go back to this kind of social exclusion, and I know that the minister had said inclusion, but actually I had said social exclusion. It is one of the indicators, so that's why I'm asking, right.

So, again, you know, does the minister agree that poverty is not merely about money, but it is also about social exclusion? So that those—I'm sure that the minister can appreciate, right, and I know that everybody around the table understands the complexity of poverty. We all do. We understand that, but a key piece to that, again, is social exclusion, and so—and if that is kind of divorced from our analysis or our critique, then it really does leave out a whole gap in respect of any strategy coming forward from the new government.

So, again, I will ask, you know, but does the minister agree that it also includes social exclusion?

Mr. Fielding: Sure, it includes everything. I guess, at the end of the day, what this government really wants to do and, once again, we are talking about, you know, the document that was before us, but I will go a little bit further, that we want to see results, right, and we haven't seen the results. I'm not trying to be too partisan here, but we haven't seen the results that we wanted to, right, when you have the doubling of, you know, the people living in poverty, you know, versus the national level. We know that's not a good trend. When you have, you know, people like children living in poverty as enhanced, you know, by upwards of 22 per cent, that's not a good trend. You know, when you have lone parents, families, the amount of people living in poverty gone up from 2008 to 2013 by over 62 per cent, that's not a good thing.

When you have Aboriginal people off reserve—and what I'm quoting from is obviously the budget document that was attached to our current budget.

But, when you Aboriginal people living off reserve, the amount of people living in poverty has dramatically gone up by over 85 per cent. Those aren't good results; I don't think anyone would disagree.

And so we're willing to look at anything that will enhance these numbers and will get people a better quality of life and pull people out of poverty. And I think, probably, there might be some differences in terms of how you get there. We as a government, the Progressive Conservative government, believe putting more money in people's pockets; they'll have more money for it. We think that there's been a lot of social progress that we've had not just in our budget. You've had a vast increase in housing; you've had some decisions made where you're not cutting back on any federal programs that were part of it for things like EIA. So we truly think empowering people by giving them more money in their pockets, plus, also, the items that you had mentioned incorporated in that, is something that needs to be brought forward in a plan going forward.

So, if it means results, we're open to looking at things. And maybe I'll ask you a question on that. How do you think we can enhance that as we go forward? We know that the strategy needs to be reviewed by 2017, a part of the legislation. We're going to be doing that over the next number of weeks and months. So I guess I'm opening the floor to you to say how we can approve the broad categories here.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, I—miigwech for that answer and that response.

And I guess the measure of engagement—I mean, again, I guess I wouldn't—you know, I would be—I wouldn't have to tell anybody around the table that, in order for government to develop a really comprehensive strategy, it would require the deepest levels of engagement and consultation and partnership with the variety and the myriad of different groups that we have all across Canada. And we have some extraordinary—extraordinary—groups that work in respect of, well, in all of them: in housing, in women's empowerment and women's training and education, and there are phenomenal—phenomenal—groups that have been doing this for so long, for longer than any of us have been at this table, certainly.

And so, you know, my hope would be that this government would sit down in a very real and tangible way with these groups and take their

considerations and their recommendations and their direction very, very seriously.

And, you know, I will extend that I'm more than willing to participate in any way, shape or form in respect of, you know, co-ordination with groups or anything like that. But, you know, part of the, you know—and I'm sure that everybody around the table understands that, you know, when we're approaching, you know, groups, but in partnership also with people that are actually in the midst of it and, in struggling, people need to be able to feel safe and secure. And so there are a bunch of different protocols in respect of working with individuals.

But that would also be my very, very strong recommendation is that to work with individuals that are living this and breathing this every day.

Actually, I don't know when it was, like, a couple of weeks ago, we were at the announcement of the Make Poverty History, and they had some really extraordinary people that they brought on to actually just talk a couple of minutes, and they're just amazing human beings. And so there was these—there was maybe about five or six folks from Ma Mawi, who has three different sites where they feed individuals, right, that are struggling, just phenomenal human beings. And they had this mom who has, you know, for many, many years dealt with mental health issues, which, again, is so important in respect of when we're talking about poverty and then how that impacts, right?

And so, just amazing people that I would really encourage, you know, yourself and your department to meet with and to just sit in a really good, respectful, humble way and to hear their recommendations and their directions.

So I appreciate that, and I offer that, or anything that I can do; of course, I'm always willing to do that. But I guess I would get on to some of the questions here, and I would just ask the minister, you know, whether or not he does really firmly believe, you know, that poverty is multifaceted and requires, like, a relational understanding to be effectively critiqued.

*(13:30)

Mr. Fielding: Well, okay, just to address the first part of the question—you know, and I'm not going to be too partisan, here—going to try not to be too partisan here, and sometimes these things become what we talk about in question period quite a bit. But, to a certain extent, you know, we feel that we have done quite a bit of consultation in terms of

some of the groups that you're talking about. They've met with myself; they've met with Minister Wishart; they've met with a number of people.

Also in certain—some of these core areas, right? And some of these things are probably more relevant indicators—housing, for instance. You know, we as a government has—have introduced the provincial housing strategy, so we're in the midst of engaging. We've had over 350 people that have provided online comments too; we've also had over eight sessions in terms of consultation sessions that are a part of it.

You know, we have had what we're calling kind of the most extensive budget consultation sessions, you know, to be a part of that, and I think in all these areas—and sometimes we got critiqued while we were in the House about this, the fact that we wanted to go out initially and meet with people. And that's really what we did the first six months of our government, really. We met. I know Minister Clarke is not a part of this committee, but she's done just some fantastic work in terms of meeting with indigenous groups, meeting with municipalities, and been, really, all over the province.

So, you know, we truly think that we have done a lot of consultation. We will be continuing to do this and continuing to meet with these folks. Social inclusion—yes, I do see the parameters to it. The one question that I will ask, respectfully, with—you mentioned racism, obviously, and integrations with it. What I'd like to see the document going forward look to is something that's measurable. Right? So it's got to be measurable going forward and, you know, with some of the items here in terms of the indicators, I'm going to be honest with you, I'm going to point 1 in particular, item No. 21: indicators the number of people using access centres. I'm not necessarily sure that is the best indicator of poverty, and there's a number of these other ones that are here.

So, going forward, we really want something that's realistic, something that's going to work. There's going to be some changes. You know, we know that changes to the CPP is putting more money, I guess, into the system. Changing things like the basic personal exemption, we think, will put more money in people's hands, indexing it to inflation; things like not clawing back any of that EIA—you know, CCB, EIA payments for any of the income supplement programs. These are all a part of it. Investments in housing, right? I mean, when you have a big investment—a 56 per cent increase in terms

of the housing component, that's a part of it, and another agreement for \$90 million with the federal government in terms of building affordable housing, we think those are all elements of the plan, and we did identify that.

So I do appreciate your question, I hope I answered that in terms of the component—making sure that things are measurable going forward. And that's, I think, what we need to see going forward as a province.

Ms. Fontaine: So I know the minister brings up the consultations in respect of the budget, and so I'm wondering if there were any specific questions or discussion in respect of the budget consultations in respect of poverty and how to eliminate poverty.

Mr. Fielding: You know, there was a number of groups that have made presentation. I don't have the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) here, I could probably take that under advisement, and we'd be able to get back in terms of who has presented in terms of poverty.

I know myself and the member for Assiniboia (Mr. Fletcher) and the member for St. James (Mr. Johnston) had a bunch of consultation session in our own communities for the whole St. James—sometimes we see St. James as one global community. And there was, actually, quite a bit of discussion. Mr. Damon—I'm saying his—Damon Johnston, yes, from Addictions Foundation Manitoba made a presentation to our individual budget committee that talked about addictions, but also talked about things mental health and mental—you know, components. But it was all—the underlying discussion was on poverty. So we actually had a pretty good discussion at my local budget committee.

I know—I think members of the government caucus have all—or will be having all consultations within their own community above and beyond what the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) is doing across. So I probably can get you back information who made presentations for it, but we, obviously, you know, consider that. We, as a government, really think that enhancing the basic personal exemption is something that's—it's giving back to people. They'll have more money in the pockets.

And, again, I'm not trying to be political, but we also think that, if you look at taxation levels, you know, if you do have an increase in the PST—and, you know, I'm sure you—I won't bore you with the lines that we use back and forth sometimes in

question period. But, really, when you think of it, that really has the most dramatic impact on low-income individuals.

So, if you're really going to put more money in the pockets of people, we think a comprehensive strategy in terms of basic personal exemption increases, indexing inflation, as well as a reduction in the PST will put more money in people's pockets—low income's pockets.

So that's one element to the plan, and I'm kind of meandering along here in a few different ways, but it is an important topic, and we don't do this as a sound bite. We truly think that if you have people paying less taxes, they're going to have more money in their pocket. They're going to be able to pull themselves up in a whole bunch of ways, and we think that there's a lot of programs and supports, whether it be children and youth issues, whether it be a number of a variety of issues, that it's all part of the equation going forward.

So I'm not sure that answers all your questions—a lot of information I put on the table there.

Ms. Fontaine: So I will just clarify for the minister that actually Damon Johnston is from the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg. *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Mr. Fielding.

Mr. Fielding: I appreciate that, but he did present as the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba at our—and I know that for a fact because—so, just for the clarification.

Ms. Fontaine: So I just want to maybe just touch base, and I know that this discussion is always rather partisan. It is. I mean, I know you're not trying to be, but it is. You keep bringing it up, so. But I am just curious in respect of—you just mentioned the reduction in the PST.

When is your government going to be reducing the PST? Because I mean if we're talking about poverty then, and if your assertion is that it has a really fundamental impact on the lives of Manitobans, and you're bringing that up right now, so I'm just wondering when that's going to be.

Mr. Fielding: Our commitment is within the first term.

Ms. Fontaine: So does the minister agree that poverty could be usefully designed as a persistent

lack of resources, opportunities, choices, and the power to live in one's own community?

Mr. Fielding: I think there's elements of that for sure.

Ms. Fontaine: That was so quick—sorry.

Does the minister agree that the ALL Aboard strategy provides information which permits the measuring of targets?

Mr. Fielding: Well, the document before us—I'll argue that did provide a much, you know, a number of indicators. We have—the Minister of Education and myself did meet with members of—I think it was October 8th, our last meeting with the members of the ALL Aboard strategy and some of their comments was that they thought there was potentially maybe too many indicators, that you're spreading yourself out a little thin. But if you're asking me, do I think that there's some information that is important and relevant out here, I would say absolutely.

Ms. Fontaine: Does the minister agree that government needs basic information regarding employment, housing, minimum wage rates, post-secondary education participation rates, and many other indicators to develop and co-ordinate an effective anti-poverty strategy?

Mr. Fielding: Well, depends on how they're categorized. You know, I do think that there's merit in designing some of these things. I think if you ask anyone is housing something that's an indicator, I'd say yes. I don't know if I want to go through each and every one of them, but I can tell you that I think there is merit in providing information on these topics. Whether they're true indicators of how one is doing when you measure up to poverty, some of them are better than other indicators.

I want to add—I think the Minister of Education's looking to join in here, but so I guess some measures are better than others, and as long as they're measurable, we want something that's practical, that's realistic, that's going to make a difference in people's lives, and whether these 21 are the best indicators or the way they're measured, I think that's key and, if anything, this government wants to, you know, measure performance in terms of how we're performing, and if you have true indicators that tell us that, it's good, you know; it's good information in, good information out.

* (13:40)

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Mr. Wishart would like a—

Mr. Wishart: And just to add to what Mr. Fielding has said, I mean, there's a complex mix of indicators that need to be done to get a good read on poverty and whether we're making progress in terms of dealing with it because it is—causes is often a variety of issues. It isn't just a shortage of resources. I mean, that's why we have education indicators in here and things like that that can help us find our way forward.

It is important that we have good measures in the future, and that'll be part of what we'll review when we review the whole process and that we have some place—some targets in the future so that we know when we're making progress in the right direction.

So we're certainly prepared to use the information that's here. I'm not sure that the information gives us all the answers that we need, though.

Ms. Fontaine: So either/or minister can answer, but I—and because both of you had noted it that there—that both of you believe that there are some measures that are better than other measures, and so I'm curious what those measures are.

Mr. Fielding: Well, you look at the current document, right, from last year. You know, we can, you know, I would say indicator 1 is somewhat important, right, I mean, social, affordable housing supports for Manitoba Housing & Renewal Corporation. You know, I guess we can go, you know, indicator to indicator, but I guess at some point, you've got to make sure these things are measurable, and if you're getting good information in, then you can measure things.

I wasn't involved in the designing of all these metrics and all these indicators. What I have landed on for 21 that was part of this, indicating that we're talking about here today, I'm not sure, but, you know, at the end of the day we want a plan that's coherent, that makes sense and that's practical, and as we go forward, we're going to try to design a plan that will be there. It might be different—some different priorities than folks on the other side of the House have in terms of where the priorities are, or probably our priority would be more on things like the basic personal exemption, enhancements to that, where you're putting real money in people's pockets, things like reductions in terms of taxes, in terms of things like the PST would be a big part of it.

So I'm not sure that answers your question. I think the Minister of Education wanted to comment on it too.

Mr. Wishart: Certainly from the point of view of education, there are three indicators in here that we use all the time: high school graduation rates, adult ed rates and, of course, post-secondary rates. Results in those three fields have been a little mixed in terms of what we would like to see.

So we know we have some challenges; that's, you know, part of our mandate and one of the reasons that Manitobans made a different choice. But we're certainly prepared to use the information that's here. It aligns reasonably well; it's not the exactly identical to numbers that our own department and my own department have been able to generate for me, but it's certainly useful information.

Ms. Fontaine: So, miigwech for that, from both the ministers.

So I do just want to, kind of, maybe ask that question again just because both of you had indicated that there were some measures in here that were better than others. And so the Minister for Families indicated that 1 was good. The Minister for Education indicated that 5, 6 and 12 were good. So is that it? Is—because you did—and I'm just repeating what you said not more than five minutes ago. You did say that some measures were better than others, and so I'm just seeking clarification. Which measures are better than others?

Mr. Fielding: Well, the measure that I look at most is this, right? When you look at the national level, when you have more people in Manitoba doubling, the national poverty rate, I guess, for Manitoba versus other jurisdictions, you know, I've got some concerns about that when you see more indigenous people living in poverty than anywhere else, an increase from 2008 to 2013, you know, by 85 per cent; that concerns me.

So, I guess, overall, we're looking for a comprehensive strategy that really addresses the overall issue of poverty, and there's no question that the information that's in this document here will guide us as we go forward.

I think, you know, if you look at the amount of children in care is—I would suggest, you know, having over 10,500 kids living in care is not a good indicator. I don't think anyone would agreed with

that. I think that having an 87 per cent increase in the amount of children living in care since 2002 alone is—although this document, it doesn't look at those ranges—is troubling. So I think we need to address that as a government. I think we've taken some steps in terms of those areas.

So I'm not sure if that answers your question, but there's some good information here that we want to use going forward and we want a practical plan that's going to make a difference for Manitobans and going to enhance people's quality of life and pull people out of poverty. And we need to put together not just government programs, but have a comprehensive plan that's going to do everything. I'm sure we're going to disagree on some of the ways to get there, but I can tell you we're genuine when we want to see people pulled out of poverty.

Ms. Fontaine: So, based on your last answer, we now have one, five, six, 12 and 15 out of these 21 measures. So I'm just led to kind of believe that then the rest here, that would be two, three, four, seven, eight, nine, 10, 11, 13, 14 and 16 to 21, the minister believes are not good indicators.

Mr. Fielding: Absolutely not. We're looking at all indicators going forward. We just think that the overall numbers haven't been good.

I mean, if you look at what happened in the last government, you have a lot of areas that we're not succeeding in. And, as we go forward, we're developing a comprehensive plan as we're supposed to do through the legislation, so we're going to look at all these indicators. And maybe some indicators are better than others and some aren't as good. What we'll do is look at them all, and we're going to put a comprehensive plan together, the ones that make sense, and if you can measure them.

That's really what I'm interested in. We're going to consult, obviously, with people and have been, through things like housing, through to the budget process to address things like poverty.

Ms. Fontaine: So, I mean, I do—again, because it was just something that you had said, right, that some of the measures were better than—actually, yes. You had—you did. You actually said that some of the measures were better than other measures, right?

So that's all I'm trying to do. I'm just trying to go step by step just to figure out which of these measures, according to what you just said, probably, I don't know, 10—

Mr. Chairperson: I would just ask that the questions be put through me. We're getting a little bit carried away here, so we would like to keep our tone a little bit down. So please address your questions through the Chair, please. *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Fontaine.

Ms. Fontaine: I, again, am just asking for clarification again, because—and it's—I don't think we're getting carried away; I'm just trying to kind of dissect what the minister had previously said, which was, again, that there were some measures that were better than others. And so I'm just trying to indicate that. And I know that the minister, you know, has referred to the national level, those statistics. But, in respect of this report which we're here gathered to go over, I'm just trying to really kind of get a sense of what measures he feels are better than others.

And I know that he keeps speaking that they have to be measurable, right? The minister keeps—but all of these are measurable, unless I'm not getting—because it seems—so—because—so they seem to be all measurable, so I again am just trying to ascertain, you know, from your perspective and your expertise as the Minister of Families (Mr. Fielding), you know, which of these measures are better than the other.

Mr. Fielding: I've identified a lot of the measures which I like. We're going to include and look at all of these in our compilation in terms of a way forward. I guess the question I have for you is, you know, how come you think that we failed in a lot of these measures?

Ms. Fontaine: I don't even ever remember saying that. I never said that. I'm literally just trying to ascertain which measures—I don't appreciate words being put into my mouth. I didn't say that. I'm literally just asking questions. And, again, you know, just in respect of process, I'm not sure if it was that questions are directed to committee members, but that's okay. But I don't project onto—don't project onto me that I said something I didn't—I didn't—I literally am just trying to figure out which measures the minister feels are better than the others as he had indicated.

*(13:50)

So I will ask—we'll move on from that—I will ask the minister: Does the minister agree that the ALL Aboard strategy by measuring targets would allow

Manitobans to track the government's progress and identify areas that need improvement?

Mr. Fielding: I think it's important to have a strategy going forward. I appreciate where this was going to a certain extent but I don't see—I don't think we saw the results that we were hoping for in the document.

Ms. Fontaine: Does the minister agree that larger macroeconomic trends affect the overall level of poverty and social exclusion in Manitoba?

Mr. Fielding: Well, I think if you talk to someone who's living in poverty when you talk about macroeconomic trends, they're going to say it's irrelevant to them. I mean what they're going to say is that we don't have enough money in our pockets, you know; there is not a plan going forward. We don't have enough affordable housing. We don't have enough money left in our pockets because governments have been taking money through taxation.

So I guess I'd have to ask what your definition of that is.

Ms. Fontaine: So the reason why I ask that question is—first off, I would agree with you or I would agree with the minister that, of course, if you were to ask, you know, families or individuals that are in the midst of poverty they would say, look, I don't really care what's going on da da da da; all I know is that I need to get food on the table, I need to pay my rent, I need to find a job, I need to whatever it is. And believe me, over the last 20 years that I've been working with families and advocating, I've had requests for diapers and food, even feminine products because women couldn't afford them. So I get that.

But in respect of my question for the minister, the reason why I ask that is that I'm sure that everybody around the table understands that those kinds of macroeconomic realities or systems impact then on the way that Province is able to respond to poverty. It's not divorced from one another, and I know that the minister would understand that. And so it does affect, you know, what's going on across Canada; in fact, what's going on across the world. It has a fundamental impact on people's lives as well, and then informs then the minister or the government's response to that. So they're not divorced; they're actually married to one another in our analysis and then in our strategy.

So that's why my question, and that's the purpose of my question. So I'll just repeat it again. Does the

minister agree that large or macroeconomic trends affect the overall level of poverty and social exclusion in Manitoba?

Mr. Fielding: Well, I'm a simple guy from St. James, but if you're asking me, do global trends of downturns in the economy have an impact on the Manitoba economy, I'm going to say yes.

Ms. Fontaine: And so, you know—and miigwech for that—and I'm a simple woman from Sagkeeng First Nation, so I'm not an economic expert by any stretch of the means—or stretch of the imagination. But I do understand that those, of course—and I would imagine that everybody understands that those then have to be implicitly a part of the strategies that we undertake in respect of alleviating poverty.

And so my question, then, is that—and I think that we can all agree that that's a part of it, so then how will your, you know, these measurables that you're talking about, how will it include all of that in respect of, you know, the government's new strategy that you've been speaking about?

Mr. Fielding: Well, in plain terms, the federal government is looking at a poverty reduction strategy; that's a part of it. We need to review our plan. There's meetings with the federal minister and it's not—doesn't always happen just at the federal-provincial table but they're having an overarching poverty reduction strategy that's going to be part of it. I think our strategy has got to be enabling upon theirs. I mean, we don't know if the federal government is going to contribute more dollars towards programs or priorities that would be a part of it.

So I would say—back to global economic argument—that's there's, you know, there's links between what the feds are doing and us, because what they're doing—and across trends we know Ontario is the elephant in the room when you talk about the economy, and if the economy is going well in the United States or it's going well in Ontario, it's going to have a dramatic impact one way or the other. If the price of crude goes up, you know, the Alberta economy goes up. Right? So it all is intertwined, and you know, you—I'm kind of meandering all over the place but, you know, you've got things like the New West Partnerships where you're able to have economic developments that's created.

So I don't know if I answered your question, but the reality is that the governments and regions are

interlinked, and if you have decisions that happen for other regions in Canada or the United States, it's going to have impacts upon Manitoba economy, which has impacts on people's lives.

Ms. Fontaine: So does the minister endorse the goals outlined in The Poverty Reduction Strategy Act?

Mr. Fielding: Which goals are you talking about in particular?

There's goals that we think are merited. There's also goals in terms of, you know, giving more money in people's pockets that we think are important.

So which goals are you referring to?

Ms. Fontaine: Well, I'm just—I guess all of them.

I'm just—I guess my question is, you know, is the minister supportive of the act, or does the minister intend to repeal the act?

Mr. Fielding: A part of the legislative responsibility is to have a review within five years. That's in the legislation.

We're going to have the review, we're going to work on poverty reduction issues here in Manitoba because we think it's important. We're very much committed to work in the federal government who have the poverty reduction strategy that's underway that will, hopefully, bear some results. I think we'll have some more indications of what the federal government will want to do, potentially, in February. I understand there's a federal-provincial minister's meeting at that point where we're discussing things. And I think our policies—you know, forgetting the politics here, it's got to intertwine with what the federal government's doing.

It's the same thing with housing strategies, right? Where they're doing a national housing strategy, right? So they're doing consultations across the country. We entered into our own consultations and a lot of times our policies are enabled by what the federal government is doing.

So I'm not sure if that answers your question exclusively, but there's a lot of variables that are, you know, you kind of have a bit of a wide-open question, and so I think we need to see what other jurisdictions, including the federal government, are going to do before we make concrete decisions. I mean, if all of a sudden there's millions of dollars for some initiative, you know, with no strings attached, would we be interested in doing it? You bet we

would. Right? But I think we need to find out exactly what other jurisdictions are doing.

So we do—you know, we followed everything that is in the legislation and the legislation suggests that we have a review. That's exactly what we're going to do.

Ms. Fontaine: Do you know when the review is going to take place and the time frame for that? And perhaps even, I guess, the process that would be undertaken?

Mr. Fielding: Budget said in future budgets. We anticipate doing this in the next little while. I can't give you a time date of when that process will happen. We're going to evaluate, obviously, the plans in the past, and priorities as a government.

We have identified, in our budget document, part of our plan in terms of poverty reduction that was tabled in the budget. So there's kind of a blueprint of what we think, and I—you know, a part of that which is different from the previous government in the previous—was more focusing on tax relief for individual people. Right? If you're able to increase the basic personal exemption, our argument—and I think we're going at the same direction. We want to, you know, have low-income people have a better quality of life, and we just think if you do things like enhancing the basic personal exemption, when you're taking 2,700 people off the tax rolls altogether so they're not paying taxes, or you're indexing it to inflation, it's going to bring everyone up, you know? When you do—make commitments to reduce the PST in the first term of our office, I think I had said in the House, and I know the member from Wolseley come up and corrected me in terms of the number—\$1,600 per household for the PST we think is something that—I gave you credit, the member from Wolseley, in terms of correcting me in terms of the number.

So we think that the taxation piece is a part of it, we think that housing is a part of it, we think that—and the members opposite are obviously arguing about how much money they took out of the pockets of Manitobans so, you know, we'll engage, and we can spend from now 'til Christmas arguing that point. But, to a certain extent, we don't think it's funny, and we think that, you know, a comprehensive plan that also keeps more money in people's pockets is important. And so that will be—that will definitely be part of our plan going forward.

* (14:00)

Ms. Fontaine: Does the minister endorse the four pillars that are—and their respective objectives that are found in the ALL Aboard strategy?

Mr. Fielding: Well, why don't we go pillar by pillar? And I guess it really depends on how it's measurable and how things are progressing. I know what we didn't see in the strategy that was before us and what was reported that we saw global results that were good. So if we can find practical results that's going to make a difference in people's lives, we're always opening—we're always open to different ideas.

It doesn't necessarily mean everything that's in paper and all the words that are associated with that is something we're going to endorse. So, sometimes the definition and—the devil's in the details, right, with things. So we'll—we're going to take a made-in-Manitoba approach to poverty reduction. We're going to listen to what the federal government has to say in terms of their commitments. We want to work with federal government; we want to work with indigenous communities; we want to make sure it's a plan that's practical going forward, and that's really what we anticipate doing on an ongoing basis.

Ms. Fontaine: So, I like the suggestion that the minister has to go pillar by pillar. I think that's a great suggestion.

So, if I could ask the minister—so, I'll read it out into the record. So, Pillar one is safe, affordable housing in supportive communities. And the objectives to that are to ensure that Manitobans have access to safe, adequate and affordable housing, to ensure that people living in Manitoba communities and neighbourhoods are well-supported, leading to greater social inclusion.

And then we can read the indicators here: so, No. 1 is the total units of social and affordable housing supported by the Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation; two, new households served through MHRC's programs and services; three, households in core housing need; and, four, a sense of community belonging.

And so I think that was a great suggestion, to go pillar by pillar. And so my question is does the 'minners'—minister, sorry, support Pillar one and the objectives and the indicators?

Mr. Fielding: Well, I'm going to take that question as a whole, and I can tell you that we're really proud of—of our investments in housing, and I'm going to list them off to you.

Number 1, from last year's budget and the budget that the previous government passed, the last budget before they were—before the election, we increased the housing budget by over 56 per cent, a \$42-million increase in terms of the money towards housing. We also just struck an agreement, a \$90-million agreement with the federal government that will look at a number of different elements. We're going to look at affordable housing. It's going to be increasing the housing—the stock that we have. We know that we were left with over \$500 million of deferred maintenance on our housing stock, so that's an issue that was left over from us that we're looking to deal with.

There's also expiring operating agreements. That's a part of the agreement going forward. There's monies that we put towards that to make sure people have appropriate housing. We supporting rent—not just Rent Assist. We have enhanced Rent Assist quite a bit. That was something that pushed in opposition that was a part of it.

And what's important when you look at housing, it's got to be something that's applicable. It's got to be a good mix between things like building social housing and having portable housing, you know, which basically means you're using—providing choice for people to where they want to live. So we think that strategy is there.

Another element of the type of housing that we're invested in, have in this previous budget and will with our agreement the federal government, is enhance our dollars we're putting towards seniors' housing, which we think is extremely important, as well as enhancing victims shelters. We know that a whole bunch of victims shelters are really important in terms of family violence. And so we've—have an agreement with the federal government to enhance things like shelters and things like family violence. There's a number of different areas that—and organizations and groups that are a part of it.

So, on a global scale, we very much support investments in housing and we think we've made it. And a document going forward, of course, we see as an element of the poverty reduction strategy, in terms of a commitment to housing.

Ms. Fontaine: So to be clear, then, you do support Pillar one?

Mr. Fielding: We're developing a comprehensive plan going forward. That's a process that's going on with the federal government. I think our actions

speaking louder than words on this—the topic. I've identified what we've done in terms of our investments, enhancing it by millions of dollars that's been put on the table, partnerships with the federal government for another \$90 million to identify all these particular areas; having a composite of housing solutions—that's there. That's not just building social housing, but it's also something portable where people actually have choice. I think it's a matter of rent assists. It's something that we enhanced at Rent Assist where it gives people choice and it gives people amenability to live in a proper environment.

So, if you're asking globally do we support housing and housing-related issues as an important element and pillar for poverty reduction, I guess the answer would be absolutely, we support housing initiatives.

Ms. Fontaine: So I will get onto Pillar two. So Pillar two is education, jobs and income support. The objectives are to ensure that more Manitobans participate in high school, post-secondary and adult education, and are prepared to participate in the labour market; to ensure that Manitobans have financial security through work, and access to income supports as needed; to ensure that the number of Manitobans living in low income is reduced. And those indicators are high school graduation rates, participation in adult learning programs, employment rates, average weekly earnings, minimum wage rates, low income rates, income inequality, post-secondary education participation.

And so I guess my question would be for the Minister of Education whether or not they support Pillar two.

Mr. Wishart: And certainly in regards to the objectives, we're very consistent. We are certainly happy to work very strongly to improve high school graduation rates as I had indicated, and the goals are very similar. Post-secondary and adult ed—we're certainly happy to encourage those. We work very closely with both those areas all the time, trying to make improvements in the program so that we can get the kind of results that Manitobans want.

And, ultimately, the goal for all Manitobans is to have financial security through work and the appropriate incomes that go with that, and we want to reduce the number of people that are living in poverty.

As to the indicators, we would not agree, however, that all the indicators listed here are necessarily the best measures of financial security in this province and success in terms of the objectives.

We use some of them, as I indicated, and we have other measures that we use in terms of trying to track participation and the nature of that participation and the success in that participation. I think the member knows that over the last 17 years or so, there's been an increasing concern about the results in terms of K-to-12 education in this province and where it's going, and I certainly hear that all the time from people about results in terms of the K to 12 and what can we do to improve the results—literacy and numeracy results—and, in fact, we'll be getting a new set of scores fairly shortly that will reflect—which will reflect on the type of success that has—we have seen moving backward in the last four years.

So I suspect that Manitobans will want to express an opinion as to what we need to do to improve results here in Manitoba in terms of the education system, though we certainly do support the objectives of the pillar. It doesn't mean that we endorse every indicator that's out there.

Ms. Fontaine: So I would ask maybe the minister if he could just go through, then, these indicators that he does not endorse, and I know that the minister had indicated the high school graduation rates, the participation in adult learning programs. I put down income inequality. I'm not sure, but I wouldn't mind just kind of going through those and just seeing the ones that he does not support.

Oh—sorry. Let me read what I have. I apologize.

Not to support, but that don't—that it's not a part of the measures that you're going to be undertaking.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Chairman, what I indicated are the ones that we use all the time and that are frequently used and are useful to us on the day-to-day basis. We look at the other indicators, but they are not ones that we use frequently.

There are other measures for those, and in some cases the other measures give a better indication of results.

Ms. Fontaine: So I'll ask the Minister of Families (Mr. Fielding), in respect of Pillar three, and I'll read that out for you:

* (14:10)

So, Pillar three: strong, healthy families. Objective: "To ensure that Manitoba children and families are emotionally and physically healthy, safe and secure, socially-engaged and responsible and have access to supports that allow them to reach their full potential."

And so the indicators are early development instrument scores, availability of licensed child care, number of child care—children in care, teen birth rates, potential years of life lost by income quintile, and the prevalence of chronic disease by income quintile.

Mr. Fielding: Well, we think that we need to do a better job as a province.

When you look at the fact that we had over 10,500 kids in care, we don't think that's an acceptable number. We know that that number has dramatically gone up by 87 per cent since 2002 alone. We think we can do a better job. We, in this course—in the first 100 days we introduced the protecting children act. It's something that we heard from the Hughes inquiry was a major impediment and should be worked on as one of the recommendations. And what that allows us to do is share information among service providers. You had people like Sheldon Kennedy, who's got a lot of experience in this area, talking about the Alberta model that was a part of it. We made that a priority.

In our Throne Speech, we also made three other things a big priority. We said what needs to happen in terms of protecting children is we need to develop a comprehensive plan. The reality with children in care—there's really two ways you're going to reduce the amount of children in care: it's preventing them from coming into the system, or getting them out—the duration of how long they're in the system. And all strategies that we'll be looking at above and beyond the existing program, and that's a part of it, will look to reduce the amount of children in care.

We also will be introducing a multitude of legislation, including the protecting—or, including the Children's Advocate, which was a big part. What we think was that there wasn't enough transparency and openness that was part of the system in—prior, and that's something that Hughes identified. That's something we're going to be taking action on.

We're also going to be taking action on a number of other subjects that really address what I'll say is kind of the red tape within the system. We really need to focus on early intervention and prevention.

So, to answer your question for a strong, healthy family, that's really what we're all about. And, you know, this—these—sometimes these things become partisan back and forth, but that's something that I'm truly engaged on. I'll tell you, that takes up probably about 80 per cent of my time on a day-to-day basis. You know, if you visit with people, and I've gone and I've talked to people like individuals involved with Voices, which, obviously, is made up of youth that were in the system. You hear of them, and you see them in their eyes. And no one can—you know, when you listen to some of their stories, and I know the member has spoken about her past in the system and I take those stories—they're important stories to hear. And so we want to do everything we can to protect children, to enhance children, to enhance their lives, to have a happy and productive childhood. And I think that there needs to be more attachment.

There—you know, we've kind of lost that family reunification, and—so we do support this, whether it's exactly the way this pillar reads or not. I don't know if we would use the exact wordings, but I can tell you, as a government, that we're absolutely committed to protecting children and making it a priority for this government, and I'm proud of the fact that we've done some good work. I think that, also, looking at the traditional way in terms of some of the agreements that have been placed in terms of how you handle care. It can be different in different communities, in different indigenous communities, and I think you're—you'll hear more from us on—in that respect over the next number of months and years.

These are things that we think will make a difference, so we very much endorse strong, healthy families. We think it's core to us as a society in Manitoba. We can't have the same situation where we've had so many children in care. So that will, of course, be a pillar to enhance families and enhance healthy communities.

Ms. Fontaine: So I appreciate that response, and I'm wondering if the minister has some total dollars that have been already earmarked in respect of prevention and keeping children out of care, and what would those dollars look like?

Mr. Fielding: I don't have the exact dollar figures, but I can tell you that roughly, we're spending about \$450 million on apprehension, you know, in those types of activities. And we're spending about \$45 million in prevention.

So, as a government, we really need to focus on any initiatives that you can, you know, in terms of early intervention and prevention. It truly is the key to enhancing everything, the quality of life for our citizens and any initiatives we can enhance the quality of our, you know, our children's lives or preventing them from getting in the system or intervening earlier to have a care plan that's in place to get them in a better place where they can reunite with their parents that we're supportive of.

Now, with that being said, you know, there's dollars—you know, there's not an endless amount of dollars. But, in my seven months in this job, you know, I'm not necessarily sure it's all about dollars and cents. I think it's more the way we're organized, and we got to be strategic about it in terms of how we're investing things. And so that's why I'm happy in the new year we're going to be talking about a comprehensive plan to get children out of care because we think it's one of the most, you know, basic elements of why we're here; it's to protect children.

Ms. Fontaine: So I appreciate the information in respect of the dollars because I don't have my paperwork there.

So I know that the minister's indicated that we spend \$450 million in respect of the apprehension and that whole process and that we spend 45 minute—or, \$45 million in respect of prevention. And so I know that the previous answer the minister had said that they—you were—the minister was looking at more prevention and early intervention. And so I'm just curious if he—if the minister can elaborate in respect of that \$45 million, how much more dollars does he see that the government is going to invest in prevention and early intervention.

And I also kind of want to just ask the minister if he can just clarify or elaborate, actually, in respect of, you know, that it—and I understand, you know, that it's not all about dollars, and it's about being organized. So, you know, what the vision is in respect of—so, really, two questions, two questions in one, you know, what are the dollars that the minister foresees in respect of in—on top of the \$45 million and then, you know, how do we execute this more, kind of, organization piece?

Mr. Fielding: Well, I think it's more about, kind of, our strategy, going forward, right? We've got to develop a conference, a plan, which we're identifying in the Throne Speech, and we'll be—you'll be hearing more about that in the next number of years. But it's—

I mean, a large amount of that is focused on preventing kids, you know, children, from being in the system or the duration of how long they're staying. That's the two-way you're going to reduce the amount of children in care.

My personal opinion is, you know, we've lost a bit of that attachment, right, where you're—you hear these stories where children are going back and forth from foster home to foster home and they lose that attachment to their parents, and, you know, any programs or partnerships that we can have that look at prevention, early intervention and getting people the system, we're going to seriously look at. I can't give you a dollar figure right here. There's budget discussions that are ongoing. We are looking at it for partnerships with different organizations and agencies that are doing those types of activities.

And, you know, let's—this is a long-term process, and so that's why, you know, there really hasn't been a long-term plan that's in place, and so that's why we're, you know, we're in the midst of developing, and we'll be talking again in the new year about a conference or plan because there really hasn't been a conference or plan. We've been dealing with things on an ad hoc basis. The system has changed quite a bit over the last, well, really the last 10, 12 years, and if you look at some of the models that are out there—I mean, I talked in the House; I liked the model that—which is allowed under the CFS system right now that Nelson House is doing. Nelson House has seen dramatic reductions. Well, I'd say, yes, it's a dramatic reduction in terms of the amount of children that have been care—I went up there myself and talked to Felix Walker who's—who runs, well, he actually runs the whole medical clinic down in—or up in Nelson House. But they've got a great model where they're essentially taking the parents out of the situation.

You look at the customary care models that are out there, it's—you know, a lot of times you'll—customary care agreements that come into place, and same thing, the customary care—you know, eventually you can go in the children's house. There's a whole bunch of different models that are part of it.

*(14:20)

So I guess what I'm saying is I don't think it's necessarily just a dollars-and-cents issue; it's how you're structured, and we're in the process of doing that right now. And we want to work in the 'digious' community and we want to work with the authorities and agencies, some of the people that are out there and develop a better system where you're going to

have less children in care and provide the services and supports that's—that are currently in place.

Ms. Fontaine: So, I—miigwech for that. So, I—from what I understand, will—the comprehensive plan is going to be developed in the next couple of years and then we're in the—well, you are in the budget process. So we'll have more information in respect of how many dollars will be allocated in addition to the \$45 million in respect of prevention and early intervention, and that it's not just about dollars and cents. So I appreciate that.

So I will get back to the last pillar, and we can finish up your suggestion in respect of going through the pillars. So Pillar four is the accessible, co-ordinated services. Objectives: to ensure that Manitoba government services are accessible, co-ordinated and integrated across departments; to ensure that Manitobans have access to information and supports that are in—that are responsive to their needs. And those indicators are: the average number of people receiving co-ordinated home-care services; 20, the continue—continuity of physician care; and the number of people using ACCESS services.

So, whether or not the minister supports this pillar and the objectives.

Mr. Wishart: Certainly, in regards to the objectives here in Pillar four, in terms of providing services to Manitobans, we're very supportive of that. We see the need all the time. Whether it's in one department or the other, there's always people that are looking for the necessary services to make their lives better, easier and more successful, and we're very much as a government supportive of that process.

As I said before, some of the measures, sometimes they leave us wondering whether we're measuring the right things. What they're trying to get at with the indicators here very often is an attachment to whether or not poverty has had a direct connection to it. And as you have mentioned a number of times, and we certainly concur with, poverty is a very complex issue, and sometimes a measure catches it and sometimes the measures don't.

So we certainly support the objectives, but the method of taking the measures and indicators leave a little bit to be desired, and this is one area, actually, where I'm not sure that they've got the best set of measures or not—[interjection]

Ms. Fontaine: Is it still my turn? Okay. Sorry.

Does the minister intend to scrap the reporting requirements represented by the ALL Aboard strategy?

Mr. Fielding: Yes, we're doing a review, right? And so I think a lot of that will be enabled by the review.

Ms. Fontaine: Does the minister agree that regular raises to the minimum wage are an important component in the fight against poverty?

Mr. Fielding: Right. So, this government is consulting with Manitobans on that, in terms of the minimum wage, so we want to hear what Manitobans have to say about that.

Ms. Fontaine: Does the minister agree that regular raises to the minimum wage above the rate of inflation are an important component in the fight against poverty?

Mr. Fielding: Well, I think we want to hear from Manitobans about that in terms of their approach, and that's why we engaged in the consultation process that's ongoing. So maybe I'll reserve my comments on that until we hear from Manitobans.

Ms. Fontaine: Why didn't the government raise the minimum wage this year?

Mr. Fielding: Well, we thought it's important to consult with Manitobans, and so that's really what we're doing.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Yes, where to start? Let's go housing.

For the new housing projects that the government hopes to complete by end of this fiscal year, how many projects are there and how many units will be built?

Let's start with social housing units first.

Mr. Fielding: Well, we—thanks for your question. We enhanced our housing budget by upwards of \$42 million, a 56 per cent increase from when you guys were in office, and what we just did is we signed an agreement with the federal government in terms of the \$90-million investment in things like affordable housing, in terms of social housing, in terms of victims for violence and also enhancing—Rob, what we found out was that, you know, when we came into office we were left with about a \$500-million deferred maintenance. So you guys didn't fix up the housing as much as you should have, and so now we're playing catch up a little bit with the housing stock.

So we're investing in some of the housing, and you're also having some of the non-affordable or nonprofit housing that are—the operating agreements are expiring. So there's some issues that are associated with it.

But, to answer directly your question, we're not fixated on a number. What we want to do is offer a portable housing solution, because you want to make sure that houses are built but you also want to make sure there's capacity within the private market. And so that's what—where the Rent Assist is a perfect example or gives people a choice of where they want to stay.

With some of the agreements that we have with the federal government through the RFP process, it's an RFP process where you provide a dollar per door, so a lot of times it'd be maybe \$23,000 per door to build an affordable unit. There's also construction tax credit where you get about \$13,000 per door, and what happens is that's a model that allows for the private market to actually build more affordable housing.

So it's a complicated question to answer because we've got a number of RFPs that have gone out or will go out that will dictate actual how many affordable housing units will be built. But the overall answer is it's—there's going to be a combination of social housing, some that maybe we build through direct supports, some that are supported by outside kind of service agencies, nonprofits, that will be part of it.

So—but we think that the portable piece, having people having choices is important going forward. So it'll be a combination of all those items.

Mr. Altemeyer: Yes, thanks for that response.

I mean I want to thank the minister, as well, for coming to my constituency and seeing, you know, the results of good work on housing, live and in person, with the Old Grace Housing Co-op announcement which you kindly brought greetings to. And that's the type of project that we were very happy to be involved in, and we did have a specific goal, a public goal, that we met each time in terms of the number of additional units we were going to build every year. *[interjection]* Well, and you can have a chance to clarify if you want, but I mean we had commitments on the book to build hundreds more units, units that we had already been building, after we had already met our initial commitment to

build 1,500 new affordable housing units and 1,500 social housing units.

So is the minister—this is my question—is the minister going to match, exceed or not pay any attention to the target that we had in office in terms of number of new units, both affordable and social, that were going to be built this fiscal year?

Mr. Fielding: Just to correct the record, you didn't hit the targets. Just for the record, you know, you guys didn't hit the targets in terms of the numbers that you built.

I'll give you an example, for some of the rent subsidies programs that are important. So, for instance, if you're on Rent Assist, on average it costs the government around \$3,600 per unit, I guess, if you will, to provide that service. To build and to operate a social housing unit costs about \$34,000 a year.

* (14:30)

So we want a combination of approaches where there's direct bills. We want approaches where the private market is able to provide some of the housing solutions. We really don't want to see this as an ideological thing. We want to progress and support.

So we think that a combination of all these things and having more of a portable—which basically means, you know, the private sector will be able to provide some of the services similar to what you're seeing in the Rent Assist program is some of the answers.

So we've provided—and there's a number of RFPs that are out there right now that looks to build more affordable housing is part of the answer. So—and, you know, again, we increased the budget over last year by over 56 per cent—\$42 million more. So we think that we're making the right investments in housing, and we're obviously going to review projects on a case-by-case basis as we go forward with them, so.

Mr. Altemeyer: Just a quick clarification. I'm not sure if I heard the minister's number, but he's saying that, for Rent Assist, on average, it's \$3,600 per year cost to government for that program. When the government builds a new unit and operates it, it comes in at a cost of \$34,000? *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Mr. Fielding.

Mr. Fielding: I said yes.

Mr. Chairperson: You have to wait 'til I give you—

Mr. Fielding: Oh, sorry.

Mr. Altemeyer: And that's with what kind of amortization timeline?

Mr. Fielding: I'm not a builder, but I believe that, if it's a wood-frame building, you're doing it—you can do it over 30 years. And I think, if it's a cement-frame building, I think it's 25 years.

Mr. Altemeyer: And so that—thank you—and so that \$34,000 number is with the up-front capital cost spread out over 25 years. You're not saying you can build an affordable housing unit anywhere for 34 grand, I hope.

Mr. Fielding: I'm saying it costs above and beyond the subsidy, \$34,000 a year, to operate the social housing unit compared towards a Rent Assist.

And I guess the global point that I'm trying to make is that you've got to do both. You've got to do a combination of things if you're able to look at incentives for people to build affordable housing—and that's, you know, been done over the years. It's an effective way to build more affordable housing buildings. Right? And there's important tax credits that are a part of it. Right?

So, if you're able to provide a dollar per door like in the city, for—in the city I believe it is—I didn't get my numbers wrong, but essentially we're providing a dollar-per-door to build, essentially. And there's a construction tax credit where you get \$13,000 per door.

So this is something where you're providing choice for citizens. They can choose to live in a whole bunch of different places and you're not going to see as much deferred maintenance. So, you know, if you're left with over half a billion dollars of deferred maintenance on housing, it's money that you can't spend when you're fixing up your places 25 years down the line. It's money that you can't spend on additional affordable housing going forward.

So we want a strategy that's practical, that's realistic, that's going to provide housing solutions for citizens. And we're not going to take an ideological approach to this. We want to work with non-profits that deliver the housing. We also want to provide some rent subsidies which, you know, your government obviously did as well, prior, to make it more affordable for people to live in.

Mr. Altemeyer: I see my colleague and lead critic is back but, if I may, I'll just do two more and then turn it back to you.

Sticking with housing, over what time frame does the minister plan to have this \$500 million backlog, that he's quoting frequently, completed?

Mr. Fielding: Well, of course we want to fix up our housing stock. That's a part of it.

Part of the new agreement going forward, there's money that's allocated. Some is done through the federal government where they dictate where the dollars can be spent. Some are in affordable housing, some fixed. Because it's not just our housing stock where there's deferred maintenance that are part of it, there's some of the non-profits that are coming off the operating agreements. There's issues with that. So we're going to have a combination of fixing up our housing stock as well as providing some supports. And you've seen some of the RFPs that have come out over the last number of days that look for non-profits to answer RFPs to address some of the housing trends and issues that are part of it.

So I don't know. It took us a long time to get in the hole we're in, Rob, so I think we're going to have to—I meant the member from Wolseley. So it will take some time, obviously, to fix up the housing stock, but we're committed to, you know, listening to Manitobans. That's why we're doing a housing consultation session, and there's a national housing strategy that is—they've done the consultations with. There'll be some more information in the new year in regards to that, so we're going to have to work with the federal government and see what the appetite is, if there's going to be more dollars, and the housing strategy, the federal housing strategy, you know, that will be from your two through your 10. We've done the first two years in terms of that \$90-million agreement we just signed with the feds in terms of the housing items.

So, the National Housing Strategy will enable us—it's enabling upon what we can do. If the feds are able to contribute more to the housing solutions, then we're able to do it quicker than if they're not, so we'll have to see how those negotiations continue on.

Mr. Altemeyer: And last question on housing from me for today, anyways, and back to the Old Grace Housing Co-op, which the minister kindly came and cut the ribbon on the construction after years of hard work, together with the community. That project had

the government's—our government's Green Building Policy applied to it.

I'm wondering if for all of the new builds going forward, whatever number of units that will end up being, and I appreciate the minister's not prepared to give us a number or any goals today, but is it his intention to apply the Green Building Policy to any new projects that he does offer us?

Mr. Fielding: Well, first of all, I want to give you credit, Mr. Wolseley, because I know—or, the member from Wolseley, because I know he worked and was referenced by the community in terms of the Old Grace—Grace build, so I want to congratulate you on your hard work to make that project happen.

You know, I think it's important that we look at all aspects. No decisions have been made in respect to Green Building Policy. I think, overall, lots of talk of carbon tax and all that sorts of stuff. You know, I think we'll probably be, you know, a little off topic, but there'll be discussions in terms of all green aspects of things. So, we're open to the idea but no decisions have been made yet

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Fontaine—oh, sorry; Mr. Altemeyer.

Mr. Altemeyer: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Sorry for the confusion. And my last question, and I'll turn it back over to our honourable critic, my colleague from St. Johns, what does the minister think of the Make Poverty History group's campaign request this year? My colleague from St. Johns referenced the event held in the other committee room, actually, here at the Legislature a few weeks ago, and an analysis I saw of the request by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives indicates that the tax cuts planned by your government, actually, will cost the Treasury way more than what it would cost to meet the request of the Make Poverty History campaign this year.

Does the minister have any insights for us as to why tax cuts are more important to his government than an increase in the basic allowance for some of our lowest income and most vulnerable citizens?

Mr. Fielding: Well, first of all, I absolutely disagree with the fact that somehow providing more money in people's pockets by reducing taxes is a bad thing for the economy. I think it's a very good thing for the economy. I think if you talk to the average citizen out there that took—I was going to say \$2,200 but you corrected me—it's \$1,600 per household from a PST increase, whatever the number is—

An Honourable Member: If you're making up numbers, I mean, call it a billion.

Mr. Fielding: Okay. Well, that's when you talk—you said the green tax. I think that's your position on the green tax, isn't it? You want to take a billion dollars out of people's wallets?

Anyways, what I guess I would suggest is that we think that a comprehensive tax policy, including enhancements to the basic personal exemption is actually going to put more money in people's pockets, and if we're able to reduce the PST, which we committed to in our first term in government, we'll also provide some tax relief—much-needed tax relief after it was enhanced, you know, by you guys, a few years ago, and I won't get into the partisan piece of it, but it hurt people a lot, and so we—and, quite honestly, you know, more importantly, it hurt low-income people, and I know, you know, that's important—it's important that people have tax relief and we think that low-income people will benefit exponentially for that.

Mr. Chairperson: Before we continue on, I'd just like to remind all members that before you speak, please wait 'til I mention your name before you speak and try to put all your comments through the Chair, please.

* (14:40)

Ms. Fontaine: Does the minister agree that access to good quality, licensed child-care spaces is an important component in the fight against poverty?

Mr. Fielding: Well, first of all, our government is—has invested over \$163 million in child care this year. That's more than in any time in our province's history. It's actually about \$6 million more than was invested in the last government's budget. So we think that we've made a lot of good progress in there. We've actually created over 900—or will create 900 new spaces this year with the child care.

We also think it's about choice. We think that you ask the average citizen out there, for their children, they're looking for spaces. I don't think they're necessarily sold on whether it's—if it's a government-run facility or if it's a home-based facility or if it's a Montessori. They want to have space for their children.

So we think kind of more choice is important in child care. And we're looking to, and are developing, we're actually the end of developing our long-term implementation strategy that will take in a whole

bunch of elements. We also think that some of the red tape that's—I wish I had my books here, but I was actually going through our regulations versus Saskatchewan's, and what we found was that there's over 100 more regulations that are on the books for Manitoba versus Saskatchewan. We hear from people in the community, the home-based community, that says it's too hard to start a home-based child care.

The Minister of Education is working with Family Dynamics and groups like this, as well as myself, in terms of creating incentives and having entrepreneurs start their home-based business.

So we want to take a broad-based approach to it. We think we've invested a lot of money and we're going to continue to have a comprehensive plan going forward that includes home-based; it also includes school-based and includes reducing some of the red tape to allow people to start creating more spaces.

Ms. Fontaine: So, and it is quite possible that I have missed it in the past, but for some reason I'm feeling like this is the first time that I've heard you actually explicitly note 900 new spaces. Again, I could have missed it.

Would the minister explain and really kind of map out what those spaces look like in respect of those 900 new spaces? And I guessed—I guess, you know, what is the time frame in respect of the 900 new spaces?

Mr. Fielding: Well, the spaces are, you know, something that's being created throughout the year. I can tell you that in terms of dollars invested in child care, our last budget actually beat your increases, not just the total amount, but the amount we're investing in child care every year except for election years.

And what we've also found out is the amount of spaces that we've created, or will create through this budget, beat the number of spaces which you created every year except for election years.

So we think that we are left with kind of a big, big hole, I guess, if you will, that we're digging out of. There's over 15,000 people on the wait-list. We think that parents want choice, and so that's exactly we're going to do with our new plan. And, you know, we're excited to work with all groups to make child care more readily available to citizens.

Ms. Fontaine: So I'll ask the question again, because I don't know if he got sidetracked or is just not

answering it, but I'm just curious if we can, again, just kind of get mapped out, or if the minister could map out, what those 900 new spaces look like.

How many will be home care? How many will be with—embedded within schools? And what is the time frame that we're looking at in respect of the development of those 900 new spaces that the minister's just spoken about?

Mr. Fielding: What I can say is that we're investing more in child care than any time in the province's history. It's \$163 million, \$6 million more than was invested last year, a 4.1 per cent increase in terms of the amount of money we're investing in child-care spaces.

You know, the 900 number truly beats some of the numbers we've seen with the previous administration, where, in 2010, you created over 237 spaces; years like 2013-14, where you created 276 spaces; 2009 or '10 where you created 630; or 2010 or '11 where you created 237 spaces.

So I guess my point is, you know, in election years, you guys, you know, seem to pull up your socks but, you know, those other years that are outside of elections, when you look at the amount of money that's contributed towards it, as well as the actual spaces, you didn't do as great of a job at it. And so we're kind of left with, you know, a situation where we have a good amount of people on a waitlist. Families. They're waiting for child-care spaces. So it's going to take some time to dig out of what we're left.

Ms. Fontaine: I have to warn the committee that when I get, like, super tired, I get super giggly, and I can feel myself starting to get giggly. So I'm going to try not to giggle, but that last one made me giggle.

But—and I get, because the minister's said it a couple of times, now, so—

An Honourable Member: It wasn't fatigue.

Ms. Fontaine: I do get that. I just—and I get that the minister is—has increased the budget by \$6 million. So I'm just wanting to know, again—and this is the third time that I'm asking this—is just, like, what is the time frame for the 900 new spots, and can we just kind of—could you just kind of deconstruct what those spots look like?

Mr. Fielding: There'll be 900 spaces that are a part of it. There's going to be a convent. There's going to be some that are, obviously, in home-based care, in all different settings that are part of it. We think that's

a good number in terms of the number of spaces that we've created.

And one thing for sure as we go forward: We're not just closing our minds to enhancements in terms of what we can't do. We know that we're left with a big hole. You know, where 15,000 people on a waitlist. So we want a practical solution going forward that will include home-based child care. Not the only thing, but it will be an element of the plan. And we know that it's gone down—home-based child care—by upwards of 29 per cent since, I think, 2006 alone. And, actually, private home child-care spots, I guess, if you will, have gone down by over 45 per cent.

So we want a balanced approach, an approach that offers, you know, choice for individuals. And we're not going to ideologically just say we're after one type of space versus others. So if you ask the average parent out there, I think what they're going to tell you is that they want a space. They don't want, you know, I don't think they're going to say, we need it in one centre versus the other, or home-based, they just want space for their kids because they're having a hard time filling those—filling the spaces.

Ms. Fontaine: So, of the \$6 million that—which, again, would be for this fiscal year, I'm imagining—where is that \$6 million getting invested in respect of child-care spaces?

Mr. Fielding: Well, the \$163 million that's in the budget, you know, goes across the spectrum of different areas. Right? I mean, it's—it covers everything from your administrative cost to spaces to a whole number of things. That's included in the budget which was tabled, so I'll refer to the budget document in respect of that.

But I can tell you that, globally, we invest over \$163 million in child care and we've enhanced, you know, we were spending more than we ever have in terms of child care and we want a broad-based approach that's not going to—just to put ideological markers in the way. We want a practical plan where parents are going to have spaces. That's the most important thing for us.

Ms. Fontaine: So, again, you know—it doesn't matter what number we use, the 163 or the six million or the 4.1 per cent. Of those dollars that you keep reiterating, what amount of those dollars—or, where is those dollars going in respect of new child-care spaces? Or any of the 900 spaces that you're speaking about? Have any of those been created or funded this fiscal year?

I'm just trying to clarify in respect of—and I heard the Minister for Education pipe up that it's not Estimates and, indeed, it's not, but child care is a fundamental component to poverty and, again, I'm super interested in the 900 new spaces. So I'm just wondering, in respect of the dollars—and, again, I don't know if it's the whole 163 or if we're just going to talk about the six million. Because if there's new dollars put into a budget, where do those dollars go? Did they go to new spaces, these 900 new spaces that you're referring to?

Mr. Fielding: Again, we're investing over \$163 million in child care. We think that's—it is more than any time in this province's history.

* (14:50)

I mean, this isn't an Estimates process, we've kind of gone through that. But, to be fair, you— you know, we are left—and I'm just looking at the indicator here of what we are left in terms of the child-care spaces. And, in terms of relating to poverty, you want to make sure that people have appropriate child-care accommodations. And so that's why we're in the midst of developing it. That's why we've invested so much money in it; that's why we enhanced the budget by upwards of \$6 million. We're not done there. Obviously, there's the federal government commitment; there's over \$400 million in child care that they've committed to in terms of a partnership with them. So we're in discussions with the federal government with it. So I guess that's my response.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, I see that the day is going on and you're not going to really kind of answer that. So—and, you know, I know that every opportunity you have, you try not to say, like, let's not make it a partisan issue. So I'm not. I'm literally just trying to kind of figure out where the \$6 million has been invested and whether or not there's been any new spaces from this new 900, but—so I guess I would ask, if you're not going to answer that question, I'm just wondering if, then, if you could advise in respect of—and, again, this new number of 900 is—then what is your department or your government's access target rate in respect of child care?

Mr. Fielding: Well, our access target rate, you know, I mean, we're using these big terms that I think the average person, I mean, the people that I hang out with and talk to, and, you know, I talked to two mothers the other day that were here, you know, that I had a conversation with. I'm not sure they're going to be talking about access target levels; they're

going to be—they're going to say, you know, are you able to create spaces? And I don't, you know, they—at least, for them, it didn't seem like they were too concerned whether it be a home-based child-care setting, whether it be whatever else; they're just wanting to place their children, right, and have appropriate child care. That's a part of it.

So I guess if you're saying what is our target, is we want to, you know, have as many child-care spaces as we can and we want to develop a practical plan that, you know, allows people to have that space and gives people choice. So that probably doesn't answer your question, but that is the answer.

Mr. Wishart: Just to give the member a little clarity as to why it's very hard to put numbers around these, I know, in relation to child-care facilities and in conjunction with schools, we're still dealing with the build promised by the previous government in 2012. So, when child-care facilities do get built and they do get occupied, it's very hard to give a number as compared to did we build those or were they promised by the previous government and finally built. The delays and the actual numbers, in many cases, are quite confusing, and the minister has already mentioned the numbers that were actually built and in some given years were significantly different than the ones that were promised.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, the reason why I ask about access targets rates and, you know, because I want to be very clear, is, you know, what is the percentage for children, for Manitoba children, from zero to 12 that the government feels that families should have access to child care? So—and why that's such an important question and indicator is because then that informs, then, your strategy. If you have a 10 per cent access rate of children from zero to 12, then the number of spaces that you have to create is lower than if you had a 50 per cent. So that's why it's important.

And, you know, I don't ask these questions just willy-nilly in respect of, you know, whether or not the average parent understands access target rates. I agree with you, probably not. However, it is important in respect of executing, establishing and developing government strategy and policy. So that's why I've been asking, you know, what is your access target rate.

Mr. Fielding: I mean, honestly, I'm going to my daughter's gymnastic class on Saturday, 1 o'clock, and I always have conversations with kids that, you know, parents that have kids my age, and, I mean,

honestly, I've never been asked that question by actual parents. What they ask us is: How are you going to create a comprehensive plan? You know, we know that since 2011, when this list was first put together, that the numbers have dramatically gone up, right? So, quite clearly, the plan that was in place prior—although there was spaces created and there's money put towards it, it wasn't as 'comprehensiv' as it should've been. And I just think that if you take an ideological position on these things and you just say, we're going to create one thing, and yet you're going to try and not have incentives or—not incentives, not have opportunities for things like home-based child-care centres, which is part of the solution, not the only thing, part of the solution—you're going to see the numbers drop, right, or the numbers go up.

And so we saw that over the last four or five years, and so that's why we're at the point where we're investing so much more money in the system, \$163 million, but we're not getting the results, right? So we want a practical plan that makes sense, a practical plan that goes together. The Minister of Education talked about builds and schools. I think we identified that through our budget document and also through our election commitments. That's obviously part of the plan. I think reducing some of the red tape: you have over 100 more regulations, I'd say, in Manitoba versus Saskatchewan.

You also have—you need to have partnerships, right? So you're creating ECE positions, and you're having, you know, entrepreneurs start home-based child-care settings. So we want a comprehensive plan that's going forward, and you're not seeing good results with it. I don't think anyone would argue that 15,000 people on the waiting list is a good result, that we need to do a better job, and so that's why we're putting together a plan that will provide choice to parents.

Ms. Fontaine: So, again, I don't know—sometimes the response that the minister gives is so—in many respects—I don't know if it's on purpose or if he intends to do that, but it seems so dismissive to my question in respect of access target rates.

And again and again, he's alluded to that when he meets families, they just want a—they just want spaces. And again, I, for the record, of course agree with that, but this is—but you are government; the minister is government. And in order to develop a comprehensive plan, it is predicated on a bunch of different things. One of them is access target rates.

So, again, that is the motivation for my question, is that, you know, what is the government's access target rates in respect of child care for Manitoba families from the ages of zero to 12? Is it 10 per cent? Is it 20 per cent? I can't remember—I was trying to just find it now, and I know—or maybe the minister knows. You know, Ontario made some substantial investments in child care. And I can't remember; for some reason, I'm feeling that they were saying that their access target rate was about 50 per cent for children zero to 12. That could very well be wrong. I can't remember it off the top of my head. But they did make substantial investments, but it was predicated upon this, as the government of Ontario, this is what our access target rate is for child care.

So that is why I'm asking: What is the minister or this government's access target rate in respect of child care for Manitoba families.

Mr. Wishart: I know this is an interesting discussion, and I tried to indicate to the member that it's very hard to deal with real numbers in this case because we're going from year to year, promise isn't delivered. But the reality of what we're here for today is we're here to look at a report from '15-16, not to project into the future.

And we've had a very good discussion, I think, about child care, which I think is a very important element in the issue of poverty reduction. I can certainly tell stories about the impact it's had on individuals being—getting access to child care so that they can get back to school or get on with their life.

But the reality is that's not what we're here to talk about today, folks.

Ms. Fontaine: It actually is what we are here to speak about. I mean, child care is fundamentally a part of people's reality in respect of whether or not they're going to be entrenched in poverty or they're not. It actually is.

So I don't actually, you know—[interjection]

Mr. Chairperson: Could I interject here?

Ms. Fontaine.

Ms. Fontaine: I'm not finished. Yes, I don't want to be interrupted here.

So, I mean, it is part of the—if we're looking here at—in respect of child care, it is a part of poverty. And so, you know, if the minister in his previous answers brings up that they—that his plan now involves 900 new spaces, then it is fitting that I would have

follow-up questions in respect of what of—what is the access target rate. There's nothing wrong with that question.

* (15:00)

In fact, you know, we know that Pat Wege and Susan Prentice have the same questions for the government, as well. And I think that for anybody on this table, they far exceed our expertise in respect of child care. And so they feel that that is also a really important question to—for us to discuss and for us to consider in respect of what is the child-care plan or comprehensive plan for this government, which is, again, fundamentally connected to women's families' abilities to work and go get training. And I know that we all know that.

So, I mean, I'm—I understand that probably at this point the minister doesn't have a definitive access target rate. I get that. But I'm wondering, then, if there's a commitment from the minister to look at, if in the process of this comprehensive plan, to identify and commit to a target access rate for child care for Manitoba families.

Mr. Chairperson: I would just like to interject here for a minute.

As previously agreed, we would revisit—it's now 3 o'clock, we would revisit the time at 3 o'clock.

It is now 3 o'clock. What is the will of the committee? [*interjection*]

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Fontaine.

Ms. Fontaine: I apologize.

I'm still good to go. I mean, I—you know, I would love to be able to—if the questions could be answered a little bit quicker then, and not interrupting, then maybe, you know, maybe we could get—I mean, none of us want to be here. I mean, I didn't call this meeting. I didn't call this committee meeting. But, actually, I'm enjoying our conversations and the stuff that I'm learning. So I'm good to go. But, you know, if we want to speed up the answers, then we can get out of here sooner. Like, I'm not sure.

Mr. Chairperson: The minister needs to take a two-minute break.

Mr. Fielding: In essence, speaking of child care, I actually have to make arrangements with my wife to pick up my little guys, since we're here. So we'll have to take a—

Mr. Chairperson: We need to make a decision as to what will happen.

Mr. Wishart: I would certainly agree to another hour but I would suggest we take a 10-minute break to accommodate the minister.

Mr. Chairperson: Is that agreed? [*Agreed*]

So it is agreed that we will sit one more hour—Mr. Micklefield.

Mr. Micklefield: I'd like to propose we adjourn at 4 and take a 10-minute break now.

Mr. Chairperson: Is that agreed upon by everybody? [*interjection*]

Okay, before everybody starts walking away, is it agreed that we sit until 4 o'clock? [*Agreed*]

So I will interrupt at approximately 5 to 4 to ask the questions that need to be asked.

Committee recess for 10 minutes.

The committee recessed at 3:03 p.m.

The committee resumed at 3:14 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: I would like to call this committee back to order.

Ms. Fontaine: Okay. Miigwech. Thank you for the break. Thank you for agreeing to go on until 4. I apologize—hold on.

I actually do want to ask the Minister of Education a couple of questions in respect of, does the minister agree that consistent and predictable increases to funding to the K-to-12 public education system is a part of a strategy to combat poverty in Manitoba?

Mr. Wishart: I would certainly agree in that getting better results from the K-to-12 system is part of a very good strategy.

In terms of funding down the road, we have, of course, added 2 and a half per cent to the K-to-12 system this previous year, and we're certainly in the process of putting our budget together for next year. But we are very much in favour of getting good results from the K-to-12 system. I think it's something that we're very focused on. I think, if the member looks back to some of the mandate letters, she will find that we were very forthright in saying that we wanted better results from literacy, and numeracy in particular, especially in the early years, and we're making some changes that we hope will

produce those kind of results. So we'll continue to work on that.

Ms. Fontaine: Does the minister agree that easy access and the proper provision of adult learning programs is part of a strategy to combat poverty?

Mr. Wishart: Certainly, adult literacy and adult learning centres are a very high priority for this government. We have long supported improvements in that area and actually have funded increases in this last year in that area. We hope that it'll become less needful in the future if we can get high school graduation rates up to where they need to be, then, theoretically, you would get a reduction in need in that area. We haven't seen that yet. So we certainly have lots of work ahead of us.

Ms. Fontaine: Would the minister agree that cuts to the provision of the adult learning programs would undermine strategies to combat poverty?

Mr. Wishart: Certainly, in terms of any reduction in adult literacy would not be a positive move. We would certainly do everything possible to improve adult literacy in one form or the other. It doesn't, as the Minister of Families (Mr. Fielding) said, it doesn't always come down to just dollars. And sometimes it's access issues; sometimes it's having it in the right location for the people that want to participate.

I know we added another training centre this last year on Lombard, and it has seen heavy use, which certainly would indicate that there is a very strong demand in that area. And, in fact, we're looking at doubling up in terms of times available in that area. That will cost slightly more, but it's certainly not as expensive as building a second centre would be.

So we're looking at very creative ways. There are some adult literacy centres now that are day and evening both. Perhaps we can do more of that in the future to improve access without necessarily driving costs in a major way.

Ms. Fontaine: Does the minister know the graduation rate in 2014 and 2015?

Mr. Wishart: In '14-15 it was overall—it should be broken into pieces to get it right. You've got your overall graduation rate, and I'm afraid I don't remember the number right off the top of my head. And then you have rural graduation rates. and you have First Nation—self-identified as First Nation, and we—and which was quite low. I remember that one being about 52 per cent, which I thought was—and

had dropped from the previous year. So that was a bad indicator in my mind. And then, of course, we also track the graduation rates for children at CFS, which tends to come in around 32 per cent.

Now I don't have all those numbers available. If the member wants the overall one, I can get her an accurate one. There's two different ways to calculate it. Many use just the four-year—many provinces just use the four-year graduation rate. It's becoming increasingly common to use a five-year term, and even that some provinces now are actually using six, and it does increase during that period of time so.

Ms. Fontaine: I'll ask the Minister of Families: Does the minister agree that losses of full-time jobs will negatively impact in the fight against poverty?

* (15:20)

Mr. Fielding: Well, our government supports—obviously, we think a part of the strategy going forward is in creating as much employment as we can. So I would argue that creating a job would be one of the indicators and the best ways for people to pull themselves out of poverty.

Ms. Fontaine: Does the minister agree that government has a responsibility to help ensure that there are good, full-time jobs available for Manitobans in the public and private sectors?

Mr. Fielding: Well, I think that the government has a responsibility to create conditions where jobs are created. There's obviously going to be jobs that are created through the public service, but I don't think that should be our No. 1 focus in terms of creating employment.

I think that we as a government should create opportunities. And whether that be through tax reductions so businesses create jobs—they're the ones that are creating the most amount of jobs out there in the economy, and they're the ones that are long-term jobs.

So my answer would be government should have incentives and pieces in place that create—that allows businesses to create jobs.

Mr. Wishart: Just in response to the member's earlier question and the ALL Aboard strategy book for '14-15 indicates the overall high school graduation rate is at 87 per cent. And I'm pretty sure they're using the five-year model with that one.

Ms. Fontaine: I'd like to follow up in respect of the minister's last response, and it—would the minister

kind of elaborate on what some of those conditions are the responsibility of government to create.

Mr. Fielding: Well, I think, No. 1: if you have a competitive tax environment, that's going to allow jobs to be created in the private market. I think that, if you have less regulation, red tape, I would say, is things that can allow businesses to create. I think having a strong economic development plan in place where you're targeting industries whether it be here in Manitoba that make a difference, having a strong plan to address these would be important measures.

So those are things—the way that you're going to create jobs, you're going to create wealth in Manitoba.

Ms. Fontaine: Does the minister agree that income inequality undermines the fight against poverty?

Mr. Fielding: I would suggest having more money in your pockets for people that are low income is probably one of the drivers that are—is most important in my mind. And when you have a reduction of things like the basic personal exemption is something that I think is important. And reducing taxes, whether it be the PST or other items, are also important.

So I would suggest that that is an element of the plan, for sure.

Ms. Fontaine: What was the level of income inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient in 2014 and 2015?

Mr. Fielding: It's on page 24 of the 2014-15 report, point 023. I'll make sure I get my answer right here—0.296, sorry.

Ms. Fontaine: I want to ask the Minister of Education whether or not the minister agrees that raising tuition rates prevent an 'impedement' to the fight against poverty.

Mr. Wishart: Certainly, I believe that we need to provide a great access to post-secondary education. I do believe that there are more than one way to make sure that there are people—that people have access, which is why we have so significantly enhanced our scholarship and bursary program in this last year, basically taking what was a very small program under the previous government that actually delivered something in the neighbourhood of slightly less than \$4 million in 'scholaries'—scholarships and bursary on an annual basis to something that we believe will deliver in the neighbourhood of \$20 million to students in terms of scholarship and

bursary access. I think that will improve access for many students.

Ms. Fontaine: Does the minister agree that access to home-care services is an important part in the fight against poverty?

Mr. Fielding: Well, I think the evidence suggests that, you know, better—there's a linkage, obviously, between—somewhat of a linkage between health-care outcomes and poverty. I think, when you have some of the longest wait times in the country here again for a number of years, that you're not getting the outcomes that would be needed.

And so I think that you need to enhance, kind of, our indicators, I guess, if you will, and ensure that you have proper access to health care in a way that you're not waiting for a long period of time. That's something that plagued my area for a long period of time, as my constituency is actually in—Grace Hospital's in my constituency. And so we had the longest wait times in the country for two years in a row. It's actually gone down over the last year or so; I think it's fourth or fifth on the list.

But we're not getting the outcomes over the last number of years, including the, you know, the documents that we're reviewing here today, the outcomes that we would have liked in the health-care field, and so that's why we've made a focus to enhance—or rather enhance health come—outcomes and health come—or, health-care kind of a strategy going forward to address the wait times that we've been waiting for.

Ms. Fontaine: Does the minister agree that home-care services are an important part of our public health-care system?

Mr. Fielding: Yes.

Ms. Fontaine: Does the minister agree that customary care is a part of the fight against poverty?

Mr. Fielding: I think customary care is a part of the solution, not the only answer to the problem. But that's why we developed—or will be developing, releasing a comprehensive plan, strategy, to address children in care and address the whole issue of the child-welfare system.

Ms. Fontaine: When can we expect to see the comprehensive plan in respect of children in care?

Mr. Fielding: We identified in our Throne Speech they'll be doing it in this year.

Ms. Fontaine: Can the minister be a little bit more clear in respect of what year?

Mr. Fielding: I mean, honestly, we haven't got a date for announcement but, you know, we've identified in our Throne Speech, so it's obviously going to be on our agenda for the next year.

Ms. Fontaine: Does the minister intend to raise EIA rates this year at all?

Mr. Fielding: Well, that's—you know, obviously that's something that a—I'm not sure how it relates to some of these. Maybe there is a marker that you're referring to indicators.

We obviously had made some progress with things like the Rent Assist program where you're having more money left in your pockets. There's obviously been some decisions not to claw back some benefits from the federal level that's a part of it.

But really, those decisions are more of a budget-related system, and that's why we're having a budget consultation session right now, and the budget is anticipated as it normally is to happen probably in—probably anywhere from March to May.

Ms. Fontaine: Does the minister agree with the previous government's comprehensive plan that raised Rent Assist beyond just Manitobans with disabilities to many other groups?

Mr. Fielding: Which indicator are you referring to in the book?

Ms. Fontaine: Well, I think that when we're looking at housing and the right to housing and affordable and adequate housing, I think that's the indicator and the objective in Pillar one.

* (15:30)

Mr. Fielding: Well, during the time that this report looked at things, I don't believe the Rent Assist had been incorporated, but I can tell you notionally—well, not notionally, I can tell you that—and some of the members, you know, the Minister of Education was there at the time, take pride in the fact that we really pushed the government to enhance the Rent Assist program. It's something that our leader's been talking about for a long period of time, and so we are a little disappointed that it was, well, I'll say put in the budget at the last dying days of the last administration, but we take pride in the fact that we enhanced, or we suggested and it was enhanced within the last budget to address Rent Assist. It's important.

Mr. Altemeyer: Just a few questions and then we might be able to wrap up a little early unless members from the government want to grill their ministers—a perfect opportunity.

Starting with—I just want to go back to the minister's back and forth with my colleague. She was asking some very good questions. I'm going to try this again around just income.

How much for a—let's just—get us on the—we'll get on the first page—on the same page to begin with. If someone is suddenly able to get a job, let's say it's just—say, they're at minimum wage and they're working full time, which we all recognize is not always the case for someone on minimum wage—let's just say in this example they are. If they were to get a 50-cent-an-hour raise, how much additional money would that be for that person?

Mr. Fielding: I guess it would really depend on how many hours they're working a year.

Mr. Altemeyer: As I said, let's—let's assume in this example that we're looking at full-time employment for the individual, so we can all break out our calculators here. Let's say that's point 50 cents times—oh, even just 35 hours per week, right, times 52 weeks a year. I get \$910. Does that match with your math, sir?

Mr. Fielding: Don't put away that calculator, because I'm going to ask you, taking off the PST that you guys took from everyone's pockets, what would that—how would you—you add that math in; how does that play into the equation?

Mr. Altemeyer: I don't think he actually wants to go there because the math doesn't work very well for him, either. But, just to stick with my questions on this, how much would you, then, have to give as an increase to the basic tax exemption to give that same low-income person \$910 additional dollars in their pocket?

Mr. Fielding: Just to the member of Wolseley, you know, I'm going to be honest with you, in terms of taking money out of people's wallets, you guys are more the expert in that area, right. You've mastered that.

During your course of government you ran—you guys ran in elections and you said that you weren't going to raise the PST, and what ended up happening is, maybe you ran out of money or for whatever reasons politically, you decided to jack up the PST on people.

So there's a compounding interest, you know, upon the amount of money that you've taken out of people's pockets, right, plus the fact if you add in how much that you take out when you include debt servicing costs, so that's—and I'm not the Minister of Finance, but I believe it's somewhere around—was it \$850 million or so of interest costs that you take out of servicing, that either you could give back to citizens in terms of tax breaks, or you could put in things like services, like enhancing things like health care.

So I guess the answer—it's hard to go back into time and have a redo. Maybe the member would like to have a redo in terms of the, you know, in terms of the jacking up the PST. Probably some of the members that lost when you guys ran in the last election may have wanted to have a redo in terms of the tax, but we, as a government, truly think that if you have an ability to put more money in people's pockets, whether it be through the basic personal exemption, whether it be indexing, you know, taxation levels, whether it be things like reducing the PST, you're going to have more money in people's pockets and you're going to pull more people—bring you back to this report, because that's what we actually are here to talk about—pulling people out of poverty.

So we would make the arguments that that is a better course than your government had.

Mr. Altemeyer: Our focus today, this being a discussion on people living in poverty in different ways that that manifests itself, we should be focused on the lowest income individuals, and, as the minister well knows, when they increase the basic exemption, they are, in fact, providing some tiny amounts of money to all income tax payers, not just the low-income ones; everyone gets that. It is not a targeted measure.

So, back to my original question, which the minister is trying to not answer, and I think I understand why. Let me put it a slightly different way: Would he agree that the basic personal exemption would have to be increased by thousands of dollars in order to come even close to equalling 910 actual real dollars in someone's pocket?

Mr. Fielding: You know, Rob, I don't know—the minister from—minister—the member from Wolseley. You know, we're getting, you know, off into the tax policy, which is good because I could talk tax policies kind of from now to the, you know, 'til the, what's the expression? Cows come home?

An Honourable Member: Cows.

Mr. Fielding: Cows come home, thank you very much.

We think it's a—thank you—we think it's a strategy, going forward, that's a part of the—I mean, you know, and it kind of, you know, back and forth a bit of political here, back and forth with you. But it wasn't included in the previous plan, and we want to include more tax freedom for people. We just think that it's going to help people, right? It's going to put more money in pockets for people.

You know, there's obviously a good divide, a good debate that we always have on this and, you know, we criticize you folks for, you know, some of your record in terms of the taxation, but we generally think that providing, you know, more tax freedom to people is an answer for low-income people, and that's why we really targeted the basic personal exemption. We think that providing more money in people's pockets—you index it, reducing things like the PST; it's going to help low-income people, you know, immeasurably, more than someone who, for instance, if you're a multi-millionaire, you're buying things at the store and anything else. There's going to be more of an impact of reducing things like the PST and basic personal exemption to them. So that's going to be part of our plan, going forward. We just think it makes a lot of sense.

Mr. Altemeyer: No, we're not done with this just yet.

The minister's actually the one that brought us into the discussion of tax policy because when my critic colleague has raised a good point, what are you going to be doing for the incomes of low-income people, his first answer, on multiple occasions in question period and here today, has been, well, we're raising the basic exemption. And it just needs to be put on the basic—on the record that that is not going to be nearly as effective a tool at reducing poverty as the other strategies that she and I and my colleagues have been raising, such as a moderate, predictable increase to the minimum wage. There is no debate on this. The minister can evade providing the actual numbers, if he wants to; there is no debate.

Nine hundred and ten dollars from a minimum wage increase is a fair bit larger than \$10 from a basic personal exemption, which is what they actually delivered in the last budget. And I'm just cautioning the minister, if he actually believes that raising the basic personal exemption is going to have

any significant impact on poverty rates in this province, he has been receiving horrendous advice—horrendous advice. It is a false idea.

So I would beg of you, if you are actually serious about trying to reduce poverty and that he needs to take this idea either off the table or acknowledge that it is not going to work and particularly, when we talk about the relative distribution of wealth in our society, because you can talk about poverty in terms of absolute poverty and you can talk about poverty in terms of relative poverty: How much more money do wealthy people have than low-income people? If you give 10 more dollars to everybody in society, you have not changed the relative distribution of the Gini coefficient one bit. It'll be exactly the same, and all income earners, when you raise the basic personal exemption, are going to benefit from that the same amount because it's applied to the first dollars that you pay at the lowest tax bracket on your income taxes.

So this approach, which his party and his team have been pushing, is not a poverty-reduction strategy, and that just needs to be made very clear. So if the minister wants to offer any rebuttal to that, I would caution against it, but I'll give him the opportunity to do it.

* (15:40)

Mr. Fielding: Well, I'm going to be honest with you, for the minister or for the member from Wolseley. You know, we get the fact that you don't believe in reducing taxes for people. In fact, you agree, and supported, you know, increasing the PST, right? You've made, and your government has a history, of increasing taxes for people, right.

Our government has talked on a long period of time—we're going to agree to disagree on this issue, there's no doubt about it. It's—we've talked about this in question period, we're talking about this here. But to somehow say that putting more money in people's pockets is a bad thing, you know, the government can do everything, you know, there isn't—I just don't think—I just—we're going to agree to disagree on that item. I just think that if you're able to, you know, have less taxes, not just for residents but for citizens, you're going to grow the economy, you're going to grow the pie, it's a good thing for residents. It's a good thing for people at the lowest end. We think it makes a difference. And that's part of our plan going forward.

So I appreciate the fact that you're not going to agree with us on this issue. You know, to be fair, we had an election, and a large—one of the major issues in that election was the fact, not only the fact that you guys raised the tax—I don't think people were even as upset about you raising the taxes, I think it was the way you did it, right, the fact that you, you know, said you weren't going to raise the taxes and then, you know, within a year, year and a half, that you guys went in and jacked up the taxes.

So I would argue that anyone who's a low-income person, if you're jacking up the taxes like you did, Rob, in the last—your last government, it's not something that's going to help low-income individuals. It's going to hurt them. It's going to hurt them more.

And so I'll maybe leave it at that. I mean, we can go back and forth here, but obviously there's a fundamental difference in terms of our approach. And we truly think that that's part of the answer. It's not the only part of the answer, but it is part of the answer. And appreciate you don't agree with it, but that is—that's a plan we're elected on, and we're not going to go back on it. That's what's Manitobans elected us on.

So that's a commitment. We're going to fulfill that commitment.

Mr. Altemeyer: I guess we will apparently agree to disagree that \$910 is more than 10. I'm not quite sure how to disagree—how he can disagree with that, but if that's where he wants to land on that one, then so be it.

My last series of questions, sticking with income in a manner of speaking—as I said, there's lots of different ways to measure poverty. There's lots of different ways that poverty manifests itself, that people experience it. The one that gets reported on in the media most often, of course, is just pure income poverty. But there's even, within that, many ways to measure it.

Which measurement tool is the government looking at using and reporting publicly on?

Mr. Fielding: Well, if you ask me, a part of our budget document which was attached, I'm looking for it right now, I think the biggest indicator is when you compare versus other—care versus the—across the country. This is, as I understand—think it's statistics, you know, it's the Canadian 'statistics'—statistics—sorry, it's late in the day here—but the amount of people that are growing in poverty, it's going the

wrong way. It's going the wrong way. It's doubling what the national average was in Manitoba, 16 per cent versus 9 per cent. I would say that's a bar, that's an important measure. I would say the fact that, you know, 85 per cent of people are growing further in poverty in the indigenous community is not a good marker.

So I think you look at the overall markers. Let's be honest, there are some changes that have happened in the system. The tax—or the Canadian child care benefit has changed, which means there's going to be some more money within the system for low-income people. There's a whole bunch of changes that are happening with housing strategies, that're all a part of it, so this is an important exercise as we go forward.

But all these elements are part of our strategy going forward.

Mr. Altemeyer: Well, and I'll quote the minister's words back for him just a few questions earlier, where he said the devils are in the details. And when we're talking about statistics, I think all of us should know that. He has, in fact, just inadvertently precisely articulated and identified why it is so important to be clear about what measurement tool you're using.

If you are using a tool such as the LICO, the low-income cut-off, which is a relative measure of poverty that does not account for the individual costs that people living in poverty are facing across the country; when housing prices increase in Vancouver, when they go up in Calgary, when they go up in Toronto, that makes for a higher threshold number that is then applied to the entire country.

If you're looking at relative measures of poverty, it's not going to give you an accurate picture of what's going on here in Manitoba. That's why we developed and used, as well, the MBM, the Market Basket Measure. You go out; you get the precise costs for different family types living in different communities throughout our province and you report on that. So you can have the LICO discussions and all the rest of it; MBM is going to give you a far more accurate portrayal of what's actually going on on the ground.

And, to be perfectly honest, with the massive amount of money that the new federal government is investing into low-income families, if you guys just manage to not get in the way of that, poverty is going to have to come down in this province. It will have

absolutely nothing to do with what you've done; it will be all coming out of Ottawa. And the Market Basket Measure will capture that. LICO may or may not, depending on things completely external to the poverty circumstances of people actually living here.

So I've put that on the table for the minister's consideration. He may not have seen that in his briefings. He may not understand the complexities of this. I was proud to be involved in lots of anti-poverty measures in my own community, so I have the benefit of some extra years. I want to pass that on for him. Market Basket Measure, I would strongly advise, needs to be on the table as it was with us when you're presenting your poverty stats and your reports going forward.

Mr. Fielding: Well, I'm just wondering with, you know, some of the information you've shared with us, how come we're looking at the numbers we're looking at, like the results, right? So you were in power for 17 years, and yet we're seeing—I don't think anyone disagree whatever metrics you're going to use in terms of the numbers—that it's not a rosy picture here. And we need to rebuild this. We need to get more people off—you know, out of poverty and in jobs. We need to get more people—give more people money back to their system.

So I guess the question—you know, because we are talking about this document—is, if you had to do it all over again, would you do it all over again, knowing the results that you got?

Mr. Altemeyer: And the—my glib answer is that if the minister wants to replay things, we'll gladly take office and we can reverse our roles and we'll be the ones making decisions again.

But to the point that I have been making throughout this afternoon, poverty manifests itself in lots of different ways, and even if you manage to increase someone's income, even if it's by, you know, the mighty \$10 that the members opposite are so proud of, if they have that extra \$10, is that going to be enough money to buy them access to a house if they don't have the housing that they need? If you don't build more affordable housing units, if you do not build more social housing units, if you do not build more child-care spaces and the amount of money you've given people doesn't enable them to access the ones that already exist, you have not improved poverty one bit.

That's why income poverty needs to be measured in those reports, sir. That's why your new housing

numbers need to be measured, new child-care numbers. That's why there's 21 different measurement tools under our strategy. If you want to talk about improving it, you want to talk about chucking some measures and then bringing in other ones, we'll meet again next year and we can have a discussion about that, but that's why those measures are in there. It's because poverty is far too important, far too complex and far too detailed to be properly summarized in just one criteria.

Mr. Fielding: I don't think anyone from this side of the House is arguing that's the only means to doing it. That's why we put a comprehensive plan together with things like housing. That's why we didn't claw back income assistance types of measures that the federal government had talked on. There's a whole bunch of things, Rob, that we're looking to do in terms of poverty reduction.

So, you know, again, we're having this argument of whether you want to increase taxes or if you think that, you know, people should have more money in their pockets to go out and be able to live a little bit better lives. And so, you know, we got a philosophical difference here, but I can tell you that the people from this—from the government and, you know, from our side, we feel strongly about some of the ideas of why people should have more money in their pockets. And it's not the only thing, but we think that a part of a plan going forward makes a difference.

I mean, we're looking at the results that we've looked at over the last two years. Again, we don't think that those were great results. We're here talking about it. There's a new strategy that will be developed. The federal government is looking at this. We're going to work with them. We're going to work with our groups and stakeholders and develop a comprehensive plan going forward that we think will make a difference for low-income families.

Mr. Altemeyer: I think we can agree that we've had at least the beginning of what will hopefully be a robust discussion over the next several years.

I thank the minister and his colleagues for their time today. I have no further questions to ask.

* (15:50)

Mr. Curry: I'd like to ask the Minister responsible for Families, in terms of the growth of families, if he considers families growing to be a sign of poverty?

Mr. Fielding: Do I, sorry, do I—I didn't understand.

Mr. Curry: When a family grows from two members to three members, is that a sign of poverty?

Mr. Fielding: Is it a sign of poverty?

Mr. Curry: Now people can use the ACCESS centres, as indicator 21 for growing families with the services of midwives. Is the Minister of Families aware that people can use a midwife service there?

Mr. Fielding: I'm not aware of that.

Mr. Curry: With any luck, the last thing being said in session, my wife and I are using the services of a midwife for our first born. It will be coming up in the spring. We're very happy. I saw ACCESS centres were there. I hope our statistic is not necessarily a part of that. I know ACCESS centres are an important part for many people and we will continue to use our services at the ACCESS centre to let the minister know that maybe one of those indicators can just be, in next year's report, not necessarily used, because it will be myself and my wife.

Mr. Chairperson: Hearing no further questions:

Annual Report of the Manitoba Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy (ALL Aboard) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015—pass.

Annual Report of the Manitoba Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy (ALL Aboard) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016—pass.

This concludes business before us.

The hour being 3:57—[interjection]—3:53, sorry, what is the will of the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Rise.

Mr. Chairperson: Committee rise.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 3:53 p.m.

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