

**Third Session - Fortieth Legislature**  
**of the**  
**Legislative Assembly of Manitoba**  
**Standing Committee**  
**on**  
**Social and Economic Development**

*Chairperson*  
*Ms. Nancy Allan*  
*Constituency of St. Vital*

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**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Fortieth Legislature**

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

**Thursday, January 9, 2014**

**TIME** – 2 p.m.

**LOCATION** – Winnipeg, Manitoba

**CHAIRPERSON** – Ms. Nancy Allan (St. Vital)

**VICE-CHAIRPERSON** – Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley)

**ATTENDANCE** – 11 **QUORUM** – 6

*Members of the Committee present:*

*Hon. Mses. Irvin-Ross, Marcelino, Oswald, Hon. Mr. Swan*

*Ms. Allan, Mr. Altemeyer, Mrs. Driedger, Messrs. Gaudreau, Graydon, Helwer, Wishart*

**APPEARING:**

*Hon. Jon Gerrard, MLA for River Heights*

**MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:**

*Annual Report of the Manitoba Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy (ALL Aboard) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2013*

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**Mr. Vice-Chairperson:** Good afternoon. Will the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development please come to some semblance of order.

Our first item of business is the election of a Chairperson. Are there any nominations for this position? Recognizing the honourable Government House Leader.

**Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** I nominate Ms. Allan.

**Mr. Vice-Chairperson:** Ms. Allan, do you accept?

**Ms. Nancy Allan (St. Vital):** Yes, I do.

**Mr. Vice-Chairperson:** Any other nominations?

Seeing no other nominations, would the honourable member [*interjection*] please answer my phone and take the Chair.

**Madam Chairperson:** This meeting has been called to consider the Annual Report of the Manitoba

Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy (ALL Aboard) for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

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

**Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie):** Madam Chair, we thought we would go for an hour and then see how much time—or how much—how many questions we had left.

**Madam Chairperson:** Is there agreement? [*Agreed*]

So we will go for an hour and we will revisit at that time. Thank you.

Does the honourable minister wish to make an opening statement, and would she please introduce her staff in attendance?

**Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services):** All right, we have Aurel Tess, who is the assistant deputy minister in Family Services, and Lissa Donner, who is the executive director of community initiatives for Housing and Community Development.

I am pleased to present to the committee the first ALL Aboard annual report publishing this—the annual report. Publishing this report is one of the requirements set in The Poverty Reduction Strategy Act. With the publication of this annual report, we have met all of the requirements set out in The Poverty Reduction Strategy Act.

In 2012, we published a four-year poverty reduction and social inclusion strategy. We have established, in regulation, a set of 21 indicators to measure progress on the strategy. We have published poverty reduction and social inclusion budget papers each year. We have created the ALL Aboard Committee made up of both ministerial and community representatives.

The 2012-2013 report to be discussed today includes information about each of the 21 poverty reduction and social inclusion indicators. In summary, we have improved in 12 indicators; we have stability in three, declines in three; and there are

three more for which we are unable to obtain updated information.

It is important to note that, regardless of which measure of low income is used, since 2002, the percentage of the population living in low income in Manitoba has decreased. Using the Statistics Canada Market Basket Measure or MBM, there were 5,000 fewer Manitobans, including 3,000 fewer children, living in low income in 2011, the most recent year for which there are data available.

We are coming through an economic downturn. While long-term trends are positive, we did not see the progress that we would have liked the last three years. Using the MBM, in 2011, Manitoba's low-income rate was 11.5 per cent, slightly better than the national average of 12 per cent. This was the fourth lowest low-income rate among Canadian provinces. In that year, there were 134,000 Manitobans living in low income. We would all agree that that is too many.

I believe that our economic and social investments combined with the initiatives of private businesses, the non-profit sector and, most importantly, low-income people themselves, will help us to create the kind of province where all Manitobans are socially included, connected to their communities, participating in the economy and contributing to our province.

In 2013, under the direction of the ALL Aboard Committee, we held a consultation process that included both in-person discussions and written and online surveys. During that process we presented seven draft action plans, one for each of the priority areas outlined in ALL Aboard strategy. We got lots of feedback and are using that to inform the final action plans.

Sometimes it seems easy to think about—think of poverty as an us-and-them kind of issue that only affects certain people, but poverty reduction is really an issue for all of us. As we said in the ALL Aboard strategy, everyone benefits from a society that helps all individuals to participate and to prosper.

**Madam Chairperson:** We thank the honourable minister.

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

**Mr. Wishart:** I certainly appreciate the minister's opening remarks as well, and we, too, have come to recognize that poverty is a very complex issue,

with a inter-social interaction related to housing, education, issues like food security, addictions, mental health problems, child care and implications, of course, for health and for the jobs market.

We need to work together to try and find solutions, and the approach needs to be far more integrated than it has been in the past, and different departments of the government need to work together to help solve these—solve this problem, not deal with it as piecemeal as has historically been the case. When you look across Canada, we do find other jurisdictions that are moving in this direction as well.

So I certainly appreciate the opening remarks and the opportunity to give them.

**Madam Chairperson:** Thank you very much for your comments. Thank you.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Wishart:** I guess initially we wanted to get really clear on the timelines and—as this is the first time that we have seen a report of this nature.

The—it appears the announcement of this initiative actually dates back to 2009, of course, with legislation that was decreed on June 16th, I think, of 2011, and the consultations took place actually just this year. Is that correct?

\*(14:10)

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** There were consultations that happened across the province in 2009 as we were working towards the legislation. We had myself and Minister Mackintosh were involved, as well as other MLAs across the province.

**Mr. Wishart:** And thank you for that clarification.

So when, in fact, did the initiative, ALL Aboard, and the social inclusion process begin to impact provincial government policy decisions?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I'd like to say since 1999 we've been working to address the issue of poverty with all of our strategies. What ALL Aboard did was it really brought together initiatives that were happening across departments and ensured that there was training—or communication that happened and support that happened together. And I think what happened is after we passed the legislation, that's when we applied the lens to the budget but that was always happening in an informal way prior to that. So poverty has been a priority of this government. You can see it through our education policies; you

can also see it through the work that we've done regarding child care and employment and housing, just to name a few.

**Mr. Wishart:** Thank you for that answer, but it became a priority, a clear priority, in terms of policy initiatives and a process effectively 2009. Is that correct?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** What I will say is that it's been a priority of this government since 1999, and what we did in 2012 is we formalized that and put that in legislation to ensure that it would happen in a more consistent manner, but poverty has always been a priority area for this government. It is demonstrated through many of our policies regarding early childhood development, looking at health-care initiatives, looking at housing initiatives across the province and employment strategies.

**Mr. Wishart:** Thank you for that answer.

I also want to be clear, given the shifts that have taken in appointments in Cabinet position, as to who the current membership of this committee would be and who the two co-chairs are.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** Right now the two co-chairs are myself—through the Cabinet submission it still has Minister Howard but that will be Minister Bjornson. Then we have the Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard) sits on the committee; the Minister of Education; the Minister of Healthy Living; the Minister of Jobs and Economy; the minister of—I have all the different names here—the Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Braun) also sits on this committee; the Minister of Agriculture; Children and Youth. We also have a partner—our community representatives are Charles Loewen from the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council; Louise Simbandumwe from SEED Winnipeg; Brian Postl; and Jennie Wastesicoot. And we have one vacancy in our community advisory role.

**Mr. Wishart:** And thank you very much for clarifying that. Certainly, there's been some changes in the personnel and changes in the name of the departments, too, which—what we were really seeking clarification on. The goal of this committee under legislation is to meet four times per year. Has that been achieved?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** Yes, it has been.

**Mr. Wishart:** And so you could easily supply us with the dates of those meetings and who was in attendance? *[interjection]*

**Madam Chairperson:** Mr. Wishart.

**Mr. Wishart:** Thank you. I'll remember to take time here.

Now, in terms of public engagement you have had a consultation process, and the What We Heard document was quite interesting in its contents. I would have to say that some of what appeared in the What We Heard document was fairly difficult to find in the report and in particular the area of food security. Why do—why did the area of food security seem to get very little content in the overall report?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** As you know that you have read the report, the two No. 1 issues that came across very loudly during the consultation was the issue of good, affordable housing and food security. Since that document has been produced, we have tabled our new food security action plan, so it is outlined for us.

**Mr. Wishart:** So you would say that we need to add the food security action plan to this report to make it complete, because there is very little referenced in this report to food security issue.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** What the annual report does, it gives you a snapshot of what we've done in 2012 and 2013. It talks about our indicators. Amongst our target areas that we have, food security has always been a priority. There has been an action plan that has been finalized and accepted by the community and by our committee, and we are proceeding with the implementation.

**Mr. Wishart:** Well, so that would mean, of course, that that would have to be in the next report, then, because it's not in this one.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** Just for clarification, that the action plans are available to the public of Manitoba, but specific action plans aren't necessarily printed in the annual document, that it is available online. We can give you a copy now if you'd like about the food security action plan. It is available publicly.

**Mr. Wishart:** Well, thank you, Madam Minister, but it was one of the priorities under the—in the consultation process of what we heard, and it seems pretty inappropriate that it would not appear or not be addressed in the report of the committee. And will that be the intent in the future, then, to choose what you want to talk about rather than what was brought up in terms of consultation?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** To be factual is food security is a priority, and we have a very strong, robust plan that includes involvement of government and community

organizations that we're working on implementing. We have many partners and we are very optimistic that we are going to see this issue improve. It is a priority. It is referred to in the annual report. There is an action plan that's been produced. Since the report has been tabled, it has—made available to the public as a whole and is there for people to participate in the implementation, to have conversations about and to work towards.

**Mr. Wishart:** So, well, thank the minister for those comments, but it was No. 2 in—food security was No. 2 in rank behind housing and before many of the other issues that you've gone into great detail in the report. Does that not make it important enough to be addressed in the report?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** When we are, as you've spoke in your opening remarks and you spoke about the—how complex this issue is, related to addressing poverty, we have a number of initiatives that we're working on. We have the employment strategy that was tabled. We also have our housing strategy. The strategy for early childhood development is now in—we're working on finalizing that document. Food security is a priority. The action plan has been developed with all of our partners. It is available, we are committed to it, and we will work towards implementing and addressing the issue.

As an aside, I'd like to let the member know that, as a response to the—or the hunger report of 2013, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) had requested that a child-hunger round table be established. Rick Frost and I are co-chairing that. We brought together many community activists. To name a few, David Northcott sits on the committee, Mel Lazareck sits on the committee, Garth Buchko was sitting on the committee, and there are another 10 individuals that sat with us and have developed a draft report right now that we're working on and looking to work with all of our partners within government and outside of government to look at implementation.

So food security is a priority for us, we've demonstrated it time and time again, and you will see it going forward in 2014 that it will remain a priority.

**Mr. Wishart:** Thank the minister for those comments, but we will expect it, then, not to be part of the ALL Aboard Committee reports in the future. It'll have its own process and its own reporting mechanism, then?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** It will be an action plan in which we implement as we move forward, and we'll

measure the indicators of food security as part of our ALL Aboard poverty reduction and social inclusion strategy.

\* (14:20)

**Mr. Wishart:** I guess, moving on from that then, one of the areas that was included in the ALL Aboard process was—and an important area—was the issue of social inclusion. And the sense of belonging that you're trying to create in communities is admirable but it seems very poorly defined in that. I wondered if you would be so kind as to define further how you view social inclusion and how people will develop a sense of belonging in a community.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** Well, I think we start off by saying that it's all of our responsibility. It's about providing opportunities and respect to individuals in our communities. You know, personally, that's a priority of mine. We did do a—when I was working with Minister Mackintosh, we had a document in which we talked about all of our responsibilities and talked about the importance of acceptance and tolerance and providing support. So, when I think about social inclusion, it's about breaking down barriers and not preventing people from having access to different services in our province, and making sure that they develop that sense of belonging.

But, as I said before, it's all of our responsibilities. It's not just one level of government. It's just not one agency that can do that. It's all of us working together and making sure that there are employment opportunities, that there are services that are available to individuals to make a difference. And this—we have to really think that this is all individuals living in poverty; these are people that include children and adults and seniors, and so it's multiple strategies that have to happen across the demographic and making sure that we're providing that support.

**Mr. Wishart:** Well, I appreciate those comments though I'm not sure that I have a better definition in any way of what—how you're going to measure social inclusion in the future. Anything in the document seems to talk more about geographical identification than it did about the social interaction between the different agencies.

Is social inclusion going to be measured by geography or going to be measured by action? What—which way are we going to do this?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** Well, I think the social inclusion will be measured—often when we speak with the individuals with the lived experience and having the conversations about what life is like for them and how they feel that they're a part of our community and how they feel that they're able to contribute. So it's—part of that is an opportunity for us to demonstrate the involvement of people in our different programs accessing our employment programs, but also looking at people with lived experience who are a very important part of our consultations as we're moving forward, and getting their advice about how do we move forward to provide them with that sense of belonging.

Every item in the ALL Aboard strategy is about an action plan and is ending poverty, and working towards that goal is about actions. And that's why I'm extremely proud of our government's working together with multiple community agencies and interdepartmentally and putting action plans together.

**Mr. Wishart:** I thank the minister for that comment.

She—then did they have a survey or a checklist of whether or not they felt engaged? Is that how you attempted to establish some baseline measure, or was there anything specific in terms of social inclusion?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** What we are using is the Stats Canada measure on the sense of community involvement.

**Mr. Wishart:** So given that, then, what will you consider success if—in terms of a change? Are you just monitoring it or are you trying to get it—do you have goals in mind on this? Do you want to get a higher percentage of people to feel included, because clearly there is a significant difference in feeling of inclusion between urban and rural, very significant difference. What—is there a goal in mind here?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I think the goal in mind is as individuals that reside in this great province, that we provide those opportunities. Some of the initiatives, as we move forward, we will be measuring them through involvement and participation in different programs. Of course, we will be monitoring the Stats Canada sense of community and watching for that number to see that it increases.

But it's about taking action and providing opportunities, and we will see that improve as we talk to individuals themselves, but also look at their enrolment in a variety of different programs, whether

they're employment programs, accessing different health and social programs across the province.

**Mr. Wishart:** Well, certainly it'll be hard to measure a difference if you have no particular goal in mind, but I do hope people find a community that they feel comfortable being part of.

Moving on to housing situation—and the minister, of course, coming from Housing, should be very familiar with this—we have had recommendations from groups like Make Poverty History for improvements in the EIA housing allowance, and that was clearly one of the recommendations in what we heard related to ALL Aboard. I was wondering what the minister wanted to share with us in terms of her government's thinking in terms of that change.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** What our government is committed to is reducing the number of people living in poverty across the province. We know the best way out of poverty is employment and education. We've made a commitment for 75,000 new workers in the economy by 2020, and we are committed to that.

We also know that providing good, affordable social housing is a very important initiative. We've made commitments around affordable housing. In the last budget we made a commitment for more afford—more social housing and more affordable housing. We're on target to be meeting those goals. There will be opportunities across the province where more housing will be built, but also what's important is that we are also investing in our existing social housing units that we have and doing refurbishment of them. What we've done is we've put a community economic development lens on the reconstruction of our housing. We've hired local community members to do that construction, with great success, and we'll continue to see that happen in Housing and Community Development. We also have an initiative called RentAid that we invested more money in—to that this last budget, and we will continue to see that used as a tool.

So I think that it is a multipronged approach of supporting people moving out of poverty, making sure that we're providing social housing and RentAid as a subsidy and creating more jobs to support our economy.

**Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood):** Could the minister indicate what particular goal the government has in mind? Like, is there a percentage number that the government is striving for in terms

of being able to say they—you want to decrease poverty by so much and so much per cent? Is there a specific target that you have set?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** We have made a conscious decision as a government with our community partners that we are going to be focusing on our 21 indicators. We're really interested in using our energy on actions and implementing our action plans around better housing, looking at employment strategies, looking at early childhood education, looking at food security. That's the direction that we're going to be taking. We will be monitoring our success by every year in our annual report, commenting on our 21 indicators.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Well, can the minister be clear then, if the government is focusing on actions without a target, how are you going to know whether you're achieving success and actually reducing poverty?

\*(14:30)

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** What we will be doing is changing the conditions in which people are living, and by doing that, that's going to make a difference. When they have access to education and training opportunities and access to good jobs, that's how people are going to move. Those statistics are monitored. That's one of our indicators that we'll be following. We'll also be looking at child-care opportunities for individuals and more housing.

It's about taking the appropriate action, getting to the grassroots of the issue, and, as we all agree that this is extremely complex, and it needs a multiprong strategy that not only includes the provincial government, includes municipal, federal government, not-for-profit organizations, that private business is an extremely important partner in that and that's why we're so excited that Charles Loewen is sitting on our ALL Aboard Committee and giving us that insight as we move forward. So there is lots of opportunities for us to continue to work with our partners and to see improvement.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Well, can the minister just explain, though, how do you know when you are achieving what you want to achieve if you haven't set any measurable outcomes?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** The 21 indicators are just that, measurable outcomes. And those indicators, they all have baselines when we established it; we will be using those indicators in our annual report to continue to monitor our success.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Well, certainly, I would like to zero in, then, if I was to look at the indicators, for instance, it doesn't have any targets or measurable outcomes. It just says graduation rates—that doesn't say much. Employment rates—that doesn't say much. Average weekly earnings—it doesn't say much. It's not allowing anybody to look at this and to know if there's success being achieved because the government hasn't put a measurable outcome or a target in terms of what they want to achieve. So it's easy, then, to say, we're doing all these wonderful things and we're successful, but unless you're actually measuring it against something, you don't know that.

Let's take teen birth rates as one example then, as an indicator. I note that it is there under pillar 3 for strong, healthy families. And, if I look at what I found in the documents that were put out, is that we see that in 2011-2012, there were 1,196 live births to teenage mothers in Manitoba. Can the minister indicate what the desirable outcome would be then by the government in terms of trying to, I would assume, bring down teen pregnancies?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** Really, what we're doing with that is making sure that we're providing adequate resources. We're going to look at what happens with the trend, and I think that the honourable member would look on page 46 and you'd see that the teen birth rate has decreased by 18 per cent between 1999 and 2000, and 2011 and 2012, and that is very much because of the work that we've been doing within Health and Healthy Living and Education, and providing those valuable resources to the young men and women across the province about prevention. We'll continue to do that.

Why this is an important trend to monitor is we know the impact of children that are born to teen parents and the supports that they need, and that's why we need to make sure that we're supporting teen parents if this is happening, but also making sure that we're giving them the accurate information as they move forward into adulthood.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Okay, couple questions around this then. The minister is indicating that the teen birth rate decreased by 18 per cent since 1999. I would note that right now in the information before us, it is indicating that there were almost 1,200 teenage births in 2011-12. That's almost 200 higher than in 1999. Because the NDP came into power in 1999 with a promise to bring down teen pregnancy rates in Manitoba, and in 1999 there were a thousand teen



pregnancies; now there's almost 1,200 in 2011-12. How is that an 18 per cent decrease in births by teen moms?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** The answer is very simple, because there's been population changes in our province, they've increased.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Can the minister indicate whether she actually believes that going from 1,000 teen births to 1,200 teen births is a success story?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** What I'm telling the member is that there has been an increase in the population. So, when you're looking at these trends, you also have to take into consideration the population growth in Manitoba.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Can the minister indicate what specific actions that are being taken in the province to actually bring down teen birth rates?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** There is, again, a robust strategy through Health and Healthy Living and Healthy Child Manitoba where we have teen clinics in some high schools, and we also have our access centres that provide services to teens as well. They—there is a difference that's happening.

It's also the education that we have invested in across the province. I'm sure you remember about the Little Black Book that was introduced in about 2006, and that was received very well by the community. Not all people in the House thought that that was a very good idea. But community members thought that it was a vital piece of information that supported young people in making healthy decisions, and I stood up very proudly in the House and I supported that, and I will continue to support providing education to young adults and making sure that they have access to the information and to the supports they need and to the supplies they need—encourage that to happen.

I think that when—what I'm saying is that as we see the rate decrease that this is really important, but we also have to look at the number of children that have been born to teen parents. And we have a responsibility to better support them, and we will continue to do that through our Early Childhood Development, through the support between the adolescent parent networks that we do encourage. That's all happening here, and so it's a combination of health and education, getting the information out, making sure that teenagers have access to family

docs, that they have information about birth control and that they have good primary care.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Can the minister just clarify for me, then, because in the report it looks at teen births per thousand, so that isn't looking at total, you know, total population. So, if there were a thousand births in 1999 and 1,200 now, is the minister talking more in terms of total numbers or per thousand in her comments?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** It is still based on population. It's based on a thousand teen females.

**Mr. Wishart:** I appreciate the little break here. I would like to go back to Housing, however, and talk a little bit further. *[interjection]* Back to Housing because you—the minister said that there—they continue to make progress and, certainly, you've had a year-to-year commitment in terms of increasing housing, yet there was lots of information out there that indicates that the number of non-supported housing that's available, total rental space that's available, in the city of Winnipeg in particular, actually continues to decline from year to year, at about 8 per cent per year. And that's been pretty long-term trend and really hasn't changed in any way in the last 10 or 12 years. The minister believe that any of the policies and programs and construction that she's done is adequate to meet that decrease, because we see net numbers that are lower now than when you took power?

\* (14:40)

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I'm very confident that the HOMEWorks! strategy that was developed three years ago that talked about building more affordable and more social housing has made a difference across the province. I know that the member himself has seen construction in Portage la Prairie and has proudly attended those events with me and celebrated with community. We're really fortunate that in Manitoba that we have a number of volunteer organizations that have embraced the interests of providing housing for special needs groups, whether it's mental health or physical needs that individuals have or seniors housing or family housing, and we're doing that. We will meet the commitment of 1,500 more affordable housing and more—1,500 more social housing in 2014, as we committed to, but we also made another commitment of another 500 more social housing units and 500 more affordable. That, too, will be met. Those commitments are going out the door as we speak.

And we are working with a number of community groups, and you can look into every constituency in this province and you can see that there has been an impact around affordable and social housing. And I don't say that we've done it alone, because we haven't. We've worked with many volunteer groups and have that accomplished, and we have a lot more work to do. I'm not suggesting that we're going to stop here. And we know that even though the vacancy rate has improved in Winnipeg, that we're not going to celebrate that, that we need to continue to invest in our existing housing stock, and we need to make further commitments around social and affordable housing.

There are other tools that our government has put into place. One is the TIF program that has been developed, and there's a component of that that has to include social housing. And we've also had the rental round table where we brought together a number of community activists but also private business, and I'm proud to say that that group came up with some extremely important recommendations. But also what happened were the partnerships that developed between private business and the community and an understanding and acceptance of each of their values and beliefs. And from that, we have the PST tax credit that will—that is being implemented as we speak, and that will provide support to individuals when they are building, that they will receive that tax credit and in return that they will make a commitment that a certain number of units will be affordable.

So there are tools that we have right now in our tool kit that we know are making a difference with our many partners. We continue to have more work to do.

**Mr. Wishart:** I'm interested that the minister made reference to the PST tax credit—as she termed it—incentive program. I would—I was wondering if she had had any significant response from private industry. I know there was lots of looking and tire kicking. Have you received any applications under that program?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** It's not fair for me to comment on that program right now. When I last left—moved from that portfolio of Housing and Community Development, the program was still under way. I know that I had an opportunity to address the Manitoba Real Estate Association, and they celebrated that commitment that we've made. So I'm confident that with our partnerships that we will be

able to develop a program that will have the outcome that we are looking for.

**Mr. Wishart:** I thank the minister for those comments.

There is application processes under way then?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I'm not saying that right now. I can get you that information if you like, and we can inform—I'm not wanting to comment on that specifically, as I haven't had a regular—I haven't been briefed on it recently and I don't want to mislead you.

**Mr. Wishart:** I appreciate the minister's comments. I can go to the minister that is currently responsible for that and get that information, because we're certainly interested to see how well-received that program might be.

There was a program at one time around boarding houses as well. It didn't have the best of uptake and there was an indication—I believe it was in Estimates—that you were looking at restructuring and coming out with some different version of that program. Would the minister be aware, then, of whether anything has been done in that area?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** Just to confirm, you're talking about the rooming house strategy, are you, that we had the grant program through Neighbourhoods Alive! that was being offered to people. Again, I am sorry, I'm going to have to refer to the Minister of Housing and Community Development (Mr. Bjornson) to accurately provide you with that information, and I know that you've said that you will contact him, but I'll also let him know that you're looking for updates.

**Mr. Wishart:** And following up on that, and I may well end up with the Minister of Housing on this one too, but in terms of the quality of the housing, do you have any measure of the 35,000 or so rental facilities that Manitoba Housing is responsible for in one form or the other, any measure of the quality of housing? Do you do any form of survey as to condition and satisfaction of the tenants?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** Well, I can give you a few comments about that, and, yes, there is a satisfaction form that has been provided to existing tenants. We have some people that are working directly in the community with them and we get daily contact about what's working. We've worked really hard in Housing and Community Development to implement a customer service model, and I believe that, for the most part, we've been successful of meeting the needs of our tenants and addressing their needs.

I think the best example we have, which is a double-edged sword, it's good news and bad news in a sense that before we renovated Lord Selkirk Park, there was a high vacancy rate there. And, when our government made a commitment to invest tens of millions of dollars to refurbish the townhouses, the apartment complex that is there, and to include services such as child care and family support services, as well as making sure that we had, as well, educational programs available to our tenants, right now we have—every unit is full, and that is to be celebrated, and we really worked hard to develop a sense of community and I think we've been successful there.

We have more work to do. It's—being a landlord is not easy work. We have implemented a number of programs that have made—provided support to our tenants, whether they are child-care services, whether they're educational services being provided on-site, but we've also made sure that we've provided other support services such as security initiatives and—as well as our bedbug remediation strategy. All of those things together have been improving the quality of the housing stock that we have.

And, most importantly, I have to comment on the hundreds of millions of dollars that we have spent in our existing housing stock in making those renovations and investments, and that dollar value could be multiplied when you think about the training and the employment opportunities and how we have changed the lives of individuals that never saw themselves as employees and now see themselves as employees, and I have many stories—and I know that you've had to sit through some of these stories—of young men and women who have approached me and they see themselves as employees now, but they also see themselves as apprentices.

So, as I said, we have more work to do, but we are committed to doing that work. And I know that you've seen many of our housing complexes and you can attest, too, that there have been some improvements that have been made. So I'm proud of that, but we'll continue to work on that as we move forward.

**Mr. Wishart:** I appreciate the minister's comments, though it is hard to get a measure, and that's what I was looking for. Is there any definite measure in terms of the satisfaction rate around the quality of housing, not only Manitoba Housing but housing in general, that we can use as baseline information and

so we can show that we're making any progress, because, really, this report is about making progress, and you have to have something to be measured against.

And, yes, I've certainly talked to people that were happy with the improvements to Manitoba Housing; I've also talked to some that were on the other side of the ledger. And it is very difficult when all you get is hearsay and commentary to get a definite measure, and do you have any real measure in this area?

\* (14:50)

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** Again, it's that visual measure of the bricks and mortar, the paint, the flooring, the brand new cupboards, and which—that are made in the Steve Foden construction site—what do we—forgive me, Steve—the Steve Foden training centre—trade centre, where we're building cupboards every day that we're going to be putting in.

But also another indicator are the individuals we speak to that talk about what it was like in the '90s when they lived in housing and the work that they see that's happened now and doing that comparison and that shows me that there's a difference. Another indicator is the number of people that are choosing Manitoba Housing as a viable housing option. That demonstrates there is a renewed respect and acceptance of Manitoba Housing. And I also understand that it speaks of need, but it's important when people are in need that this is—there is an opportunity for them to live in social housing, and I'm proud that we're able to provide for many families either new social housing units or refreshed, as we call them, social housing units.

**Mr. Wishart:** I appreciate the minister's comments.

During the What We Heard summary, there was quite a few very positive comments about the community development corporations and their activities, and I know from having met with most of them that they—the range of activities is quite wide, some more active in the area of housing, in particular, others far more active in working with youth and the disadvantaged.

I wonder if the minister could make me aware of her government's intention as to funding for them in the future. Their funding has been relatively static for a period of time; in fact, there were minor cuts in the last budget yet the response and the feedback that seemed to be available both from talking to individuals and from the report on What We Heard

was very positive. Is this an area where we might see more priority in the future?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** What I can tell you is that we have showed our commitment since 1999 to social enterprises across this province and we're doing it with action, and I think you're speaking of BUILD, and BUILD is one of those initiatives that because of the investments that were made through the then-department of ETT and now Jobs and Economy that helped them develop the program that they have that is taking hard-to-employ individuals forward and making sure that they have training and that they have access to good jobs, and the partnership with Housing as well has been really important. They now are looking at diversifying, on looking at different energy opportunities on reserve with some First Nations partnerships, and that's exciting.

I think part of the funding that happens with the social enterprises is through the Province of Manitoba, through Neighbourhoods Alive! is a really good supporter of them, but also they rely on federal funding, and I know that you've had conversations with your Member of Parliament and will continue to have those conversations about the importance that they remain at the table and continue to support social enterprises.

**Mr. Wishart:** I appreciate those comments from the minister.

Moving on, and one of your markers in this was actually graduation rates, in particular, high school graduation rates, and it's good to see that progress has been made in the last few years. But I noticed here that we did not do a comparison in this case with where we stand across Canada and, of course, in some of your categories where you look—where you were measuring success, you measured against Canada, and in this one, you did not. And looking at the numbers we find that Manitoba's graduation rates are still quite a bit behind the Canadian average. Would the minister or the Chair care to answer that question?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** So what we are doing here is we are addressing the issue of poverty reduction and social inclusion in the province of Manitoba, and the best measure is to continue to monitor the graduation rates in Manitoba. It is a complex journey to look at doing the comparisons across jurisdictions because there's different models that are being used and different denominators around education. So the best thing we can do is continue to monitor our graduation rates and make sure that we're providing

opportunities to support young people so that they can see themselves as learners and continue to find their way through our Manitoba education system and successfully graduate.

**Mr. Wishart:** And thank the minister.

One of the things—and your comment on the fact that there isn't necessarily a standard across Canada certainly does touch a few points. One thing that seemed a little unusual in this report is it—we had a seven year—from entering grade 9, a seven-year measure before graduation was measured as completed, and yet when I checked across Canada I couldn't see that that would appear to be the standard. Is that what we're using here, or is that what everybody's using, or is that specific to this report?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** We are using the information from Manitoba Education. This is how they choose to do their measurement, and we respect how they complete it, and that we will rely on them to continue to provide us the information for this indicator.

**Mr. Wishart:** Well, I appreciate the comment and—but is that in fact a specific to Manitoba standard—which was the question—or is that a standard used all across Canada?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I real—I cannot comment on that, we'll have to get that information back to you. But I'd like to correct the record, that it's also from the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy that we get the graduation rate information, as well, too. So it's a combination of both.

**Mr. Wishart:** So the Manitoba census for health policy uses the seven-year measure? Is that where—why you use the seven-year measure?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** That's correct.

**An Honourable Member:** We've certainly—and the report does touch on the issue of very low Aboriginal graduation rates, and that's certainly an issue here and clearly an issue in other provinces as well, and high-risk factors associated with graduation including not only Aboriginal but whether or not the child's been in Child and Family Services and related ones. Do you have specific initiatives related to the Aboriginal graduation rate?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** Well, what we have been doing is we've been working with our Aboriginal partners as well as the federal government in looking at a Aboriginal education strategy. We have initiatives that we support through the Frontier School

Division, and work in close partnership with them and have seen some success. One example is at Frontier we have—we're able through Housing and Community Development to fund a carpenter program where they're actually building houses, so it's looking at those different initiatives.

But it starts early on, it's about early childhood education and support for families. That's where we need to make those investments, and prenatal care as well. So looking at the whole spectrum, and that's where we, through Healthy Child Manitoba, have been putting our efforts and working with our partners and seeing some good outcomes. Pathways is another example of a initiative that is in the North End of Winnipeg that is targeting supports to individuals, and we're seeing that they're getting educational supports but also social supports as they're attending, and there's been great success.

Those are only examples of a few. I know that Education and Aboriginal and Northern Affairs and Healthy Child Manitoba have a long inventory—and I might have that—a long inventory of different education programs, and we can share that with you.

**Mr. Wishart:** Well, and thank you for the comments.

I did note also that one of the other measures used across Canada quite a bit is the dropout rates. And the numbers that were available across Canada didn't seem too very positive, in particular when Manitoba is near the bottom of the list most every year in terms of having highest dropout rates. And actually the progress seems to be—and progress been made all across Canada, and that's the good news, but the progress here in Manitoba seems to be behind the national average. Is that something that you intend to monitor as well, because you do have government legislation around dropping out of high school, and I guess we'd like to know, we'd all like to know, whether this has been effective?

\* (15:00)

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I can only speak to the ALL Aboard strategy of poverty reduction and social inclusion, and for this strategy, our indicator is measuring graduation rates.

And I'd like to put on the record, that we have seen an 18.3 per cent increase between 2002 and 2012. And so, that is significant, but we have a lot more work to do and we're committed to doing that.

**Mr. Wishart:** Well, given that we were amongst the worst in Canada, it's nice to see that we are, in fact, making progress, but we didn't actually make progress against the other provinces, from what we can tell. And I'll leave that as it's said.

In terms of adult learning, the numbers actually are very encouraging, and though they're somewhat static, I'd certainly like to see a growth trend there. But we do see a significant number of students coming into adult learning and, in particular, there's been an increase in Aboriginal students graduating there. And there, too, the dropout rates are high but that's always been the case in the area of adult learning.

Are there any new initiatives in this area, of one where funding has been very static in the latter years, and yet demand seems to be growing?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** Well, we have a number of adult learning programs that are across the province and that we will ensure that we continue to provide them with support. We've had specific programs where we've been looking at literacy and numeracy, as well as ensuring that we're doing pre-employment programs.

We're doing the readiness but we also are making investments in rural and northern areas. University College of the North is a really good example of providing those kinds of resources in the north, and we'll continue to do that.

And thank you for acknowledging our progress in this indicator.

**Madam Chairperson:** The hour being past 3 o'clock, I'd like to ask the committee what is the will of committee in regards to proceeding?

**Mr. Wishart:** I think we'd like to continue for, oh, at least another half-hour. I know that some of my colleagues have questions, as well—[interjection] Another hour?

**Madam Chairperson:** So the committee is agreeing to sit 'til 4 o'clock. Is there agreement? [Agreed] Committee proceed.

**Mr. Wishart:** And in terms of adult learning—and I recognize there's several categories, but we're still talking about the high-school level and below here—I'm not talking about post-secondary.

But there has been an initiative in a number of centres for Red River College, also to get into the area of adult literacy programs, when we actually,

often in the same community, have already have adult literacy programs available through other agencies. And, I guess I'm a little concerned that we seem to be duplicating an effort in an area where clearly funding's never going to be enough. Why have we had an initiative in that area? Is that something that the minister's aware of, and is something that you're funding at some point?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I—[*interjection*] Red River's providing adult learning services as well.

**Madam Chairperson:** Mr. Wishart? The honourable minister?

**Mr. Wishart:** My apologies to the Chair, we're having a conversation that's not on record.

**Madam Chairperson:** Mr. Wishart.

**Mr. Wishart:** But we do have, in some communities that already have adult learning centres, we do have Red River also trying to provide the same service, and competing, effectively, for the same clientele. If they increase the clientele, that's great. But it does seem to be dividing the client base and, certainly, dividing the funding, I suspect. I wondered, is this something that we're going to see more of, or is this a new initiative?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I'm—I really can't speak to this because this is an advanced education piece, and so I can just speak generally about the importance of providing adult learning to individuals, so that they can proceed to employment and training. So I'm—I'll certainly speak with the minister of advanced education and education, and have a conversation.

**Mr. Wishart:** And I appreciate that, though the service they're trying to provide is actually high-school equivalency, it is not—[*interjection*]. But it isn't—it is an advanced education agency that is trying to provide it.

Turn—moving on, I guess, in terms of employment numbers, we continue to grow in employment, and that's a good thing because we certainly need to work to do that. At one point—and the section noted in the report—the EIA supports and allowance actually came out of ET and T, and now, my understanding is that—and the rationale being, of course, that these were the people that needed training and creating opportunities to work in the workplace. I wanted to be clear now, are they moved to—is the EIA allowances and supports moved to Jobs and the Economy? Is that where they are now?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** We have a partnership between Jobs and Economy and Family Services. So the policy division of EIA is with Jobs and Economy, but we work extremely closely with Family Services to implement a number of employment and training programs, and you saw the action plan that we have in our employment strategy. And right now we are in the process of rolling out our strategy to provide supports to single parents, and seeing much success at our information sessions that a lot of people are attending and are interested in the opportunity of finding employment and education.

**Mr. Wishart:** So just to be clear then, the policy development process will be in Jobs and the Economy, and the continued supports that are available through EIA will remain with Family Services? And so when people come in with problems related to cheques through family—we would direct them to Family Services rather than to Jobs and the Economy?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** That's correct.

**An Honourable Member:** Well, I appreciate that. That's certainly something that's already come up in a number of people's constituencies, and there has been a little bit of confusion about that with the—with calls probably going to the wrong place, and we certainly don't want to give anyone in the public the runaround when it comes to the various government departments. We need to be able to give them an absolutely clear answer as to who will be dealing with the problems.

In terms of net numbers, certainly we've increased the number of jobs, yet we don't seem to have quite kept up with the growth in Manitoba. And growth in Manitoba's a good thing, but we are a little further behind, only about 1 and a half per cent, which is relatively minor in the numbers. But when you break it out into different categories, the Aboriginal employment numbers are quite substantially lower. Metis numbers, however, are very close to the general population, and that's certainly a very good thing and probably indicative of mainstreaming in many regards and the number of entrepreneurs we actually find in that particular sector.

What programs specifically has the government considered to help improve Aboriginal employment numbers and, in particular, you know, in the areas that—in the North and other rural areas where those numbers are really bad?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** That again speaks to a strategy that includes education and training opportunities, apprenticeship programs. So UCN is one of those supports that we provide, and also our hydro development. There's a robust strategy that when a dam is going to be built within a community, that we look at partnering with First Nations communities, we look at establishing training communities within those communities and targeting jobs for those individuals.

So there is opportunities and specific strategies across the province to engage Aboriginal people in the workforce. The Province of Manitoba knows that this is an area of interest. Business has been approaching us, chambers of commerce have been approaching us—how do we work together? And we are going to continue to work across the province. And, again, it's the—it's a whole strategy. It's not—it's making sure that we're providing the right education and training and the right employment opportunities for individuals.

**Mr. Wishart:** I thank the minister for those comments, and it's certainly true. We hear from chambers of commerce and the business community about the need for programs in this area. I didn't hear any specific initiatives associated with this report, in terms of ALL Aboard, that would be new initiatives. Is this sort of part of the ongoing process? Is that what the minister's indicating?

\* (15:10)

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** What I'm indicating is that supports for Aboriginal employment has been a priority of this government since 1999, and we're going to continue to do that. I know that the member is very familiar with the investments we've made in Thompson and The Pas with University College of the North. We have the mining academy in Flin Flon. Those are long-term commitments that this government has made to make a difference to provide apprenticeship programs and education programs and also looking at specific jobs when it comes to the development of hydro.

**Mr. Wishart:** Just one specific question for the minister, and maybe this is better to the minister of mines, but the mining academy so far seems to be mostly an announcement, not a lot of initiative that anyone in Flin Flon has been able to report. Can the minister indicate to me when we will see something specific in terms of concrete actions there?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I need to apologize to the member that that question has to be forwarded to the

appropriate department so you can get some accurate information.

**Mr. Wishart:** And I did want to touch a little bit on the—in 2012, some of the data that was indicated here, that the average weekly earnings increased in Manitoba by \$31.46. When you look at inflation and any increases in taxes and fees, does the minister feel that an increased weekly wage of \$31.46 cents is going to be enough to cover them?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** The data is controlled for inflation, so that's what it's telling us.

**Mr. Wishart:** Okay, well thank you for—to the minister for that information.

So the data is corrected for inflation but not for increase in taxes—not for tax load.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** Correct.

**Mr. Wishart:** Now, when we talk poverty and income, there are two measures that are commonly used across Canada, and the minister made reference in her opening comments about the market-based basket measure, and then, of course, there is the argument as to whether that is the most accurate or whether the after-tax LICOs will be the best way to measure that. They're both useful measures. And I would certainly encourage the report to continue to measure Manitobans' process, in terms of getting out of poverty, and in both of those. But I would like to point out that a number of the market-based measures, actually, in areas where things like the PST have an impact, because many of the inputs that are part of that calculation are actually covered under provincial sales tax. So the question is: Is that built into that calculation? Increases in PST, are they built into that calculation or are they not?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** Statistics Canada does take that into account.

**Mr. Wishart:** And talking further about some of the low-income numbers, and the minister actually made specific reference to the single-parent families and the fairly dramatic numbers in that regard in terms of increase and the obvious financial stress that they seem to be under in terms of dealing with increasing costs and trying to stay above the poverty line, and there's been certainly growth in that area, and we have been hearing that for some time from some of the not-for-profits that work in their area that that's actually the sector that seems to be having the greatest growth and the greatest difficulty.

Are there specific programs, then, related to that, either for families where the single parent is working

or programs where they are not working and are supported by social assistance? Are there either?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** May I ask for—like, what programs are you referring to? [*interjection*]

**Madam Chairperson:** Mr. Wishart.

**Mr. Wishart:** Sorry, asking the minister if there are any specific programs that are designed to help the single parent specifically.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** There are a number of programs that are designed, and the most current one that we have is our employment strategy that we're rolling out with Jobs and the Economy in inviting a number of single-parent men and women to come to information sessions and look at career planning with them that may include education as well as training opportunities.

There—we can look at our child-care programs that we provide support. There are a number of education programs that are happening, housing initiatives and family support programs that are happening. There are income-based supports that happen for a number of single parents that help support them.

I have information here, a single parent with two children, they've seen an increase since 1999 to 2013 to 33.6 per cent, so that's—those are individuals that are on employment and income assistance. And as we've spoken before, that we're looking at how do we remove some of the barriers for employment and help support the move to employment, and that includes education, availability of jobs, as well as child-care opportunities.

**Mr. Wishart:** And I appreciate the minister's comments, but, I guess, do you have specific target in mind in that regard? You've made reference to the existing programs that are out there, and I guess I was looking for anything in terms of new initiatives, and what's new often is relevant to what particular time frame we're referring to here.

But we've been hearing, as I said earlier, from a number of the agencies, the not-for-profit agencies that are working with people in poverty and found that this area was where the greatest growth had been in the last year or two. I was wondering if there was any specific new initiatives related to that to help catch up what appears to be a developing backlog in that area.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** What I did when I first began my remarks, I spoke about an innovative program that is

brand new, the employment program through the Jobs and Economy which is a partnership with a number of community organizations and with single parents themselves, and developing an initiative.

Our investments have been since 1999, and we have made investments in education and in child care and through Healthy Child Manitoba that are vital as we move forward, and we need to continue to make those investments. And as we evaluate our—the investments we've made and we will look at the opportunities for new programming to happen, but we have a strong foundation that we're going to continue to build upon.

**Mr. Wishart:** Thank you, Madam Minister, for those comments.

I guess, moving on and talking a little bit about post-secondary education participation, and the two referenced baseline indicators in the most recent data indicate some slight decreases in terms of participation in post-secondary education. I wonder if the minister—I know they—she has a couple of initiatives around that, but I wonder if the minister would care to indicate whether she's seen any response yet in terms of an increased number of children—or individuals, they won't be necessarily children anymore—taking advantage of post-secondary education in the province.

\* (15:20)

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** Well, our involvement in post-secondary education, the No. 1 important tool that we've used is making sure that tuitions are affordable, making sure that we have bursary programs that are available to individuals that are entering. Our ACCESS programs are another example of—and some of those ACCESS programs are specific for Aboriginal learners, and I know the member is interested in that population, and so they're accessing that.

As far as any new data that is not represented in this annual report, I do not have access to that. We would have to speak to the Ministry of Education and find that information out.

**Mr. Wishart:** Well, I appreciate the comments.

So we really don't know whether we had a response to any of the new initiatives at this point, and even in the—this year's enrolment data.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** We will do that comparison as we prepare the '13-14 annual report. We know that the Department of Education is monitoring it very



closely. This report, we cannot forget, is a snapshot of a number of initiatives that are happening, and it shows and demonstrates the co-operation and collaboration between many departments, and we'll continue to work with those departments and see that we are having success with our indicators.

**Mr. Wishart:** Moving on and talking about children—it's particularly in daycare and support prior to entering school, and there's certainly some numbers in here that are concerning in terms of the relatively low numbers that are properly prepared, it seems, to go to kindergarten, and there seems to be some regional differences as supplied by this data and others. And looking at—and it's very difficult to find comparable figures in other provinces, so it is difficult to make comparison, but do you feel we are adequately preparing our children for their life of learning?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** That's exactly what the EDI is doing, the Early Development Instrument scores that we've been administering across this province for a number of years with our Education partners and led by Healthy Child Manitoba. And what this does is this gives us a snapshot of what's happening in the province, and helps us to direct resources and develop partnerships and look at where we need to make investments.

So I'm confident that as we move forward and make commitments in this area—I need to talk to you about the initiative that Minister Chief had led this fall: starting strong, starting early. And in that initiative he was able to bring a number of community partners, including businesses and foundations, together. And the McConnell foundation was one of those initiatives that came forward, and you had been asking about what's new, and the McConnell foundation's commitment to the Point Douglas area is new and will look at how do we work with a particular community and provide supports, whether to preschool children, and looking at starting at a very early age with providing those supports and making a long-term commitment to that community. And in doing that, we hope that we will see the readiness for those community members and—or for those children improve and do very well. We have a lot of confidence in that program.

**Mr. Wishart:** And you made reference to the EDI program, and there is certainly some EDI data in the report, but it really doesn't show any significant trend in any regards. Are we dealing with a fairly static situation, or is there—there is—is there measurable—

because it's done—updated biennially, there must be more recent data than is indicated here. Are we making any progress?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** The statistics that we have go back to 2005, and I can tell you that those numbers have stayed stable.

**Mr. Wishart:** Well, and that was my concern as well, as anything I was able to find indicated actually very little progress in this area. And clearly that's concerning because proper preparation for a lifelong of learning and education is very important, especially in early childhood years. So you have some new initiatives. With a biennial reporting process, how soon do you think you would be able to get measurably results?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** Well, I—what we're going to focus on in our annual report of the ALL Aboard strategy is looking at the EDI indicator. They are going to be a number of resources that will be—that are implemented in communities across the province and will continue to be implemented. There will be a new initiative, such as the McConnell initiative implemented in Point Douglas, and every year this measurement, the EDI, is taken, so we will be monitoring this. You will see this measurement yet again in the '14-15 report and we will be able to show those comparisons.

**Mr. Wishart:** Appreciate that comment.

So we can expect some improvement because of these initiatives? Will it show as soon as '14-15?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** We would all hope that. We know that when we are dealing with the complex issue of poverty and the symptoms of poverty that strategies have to be implemented and wouldn't we all like to see it improve immediately. Long-term commitments have to be made and that's what ALL Aboard is talking about, is that you need to make commitments, you need to have indicators, you need to monitor them. And I'm confident that with the investments that we make, that the lives of individuals will improve. And I will not be able to predict what's going to happen to any particular indicator in this and I don't think you want me to. I think that's what's happened with this whole initiative, is that we have set up 21 indicators that is going to monitor the progress of all us. It's going to measure the progress of the province but also in all of these indicators it includes federal government role, municipal government role, non-

profit, individuals themselves and private business. So it's—as the name says, we're all in this together.

**Mr. Wishart:** Madam Chair, and I appreciate the minister's comments.

Talking further about licensed child care and, of course, most of that is either kindergarten or primary school, in particular, we know—we all know, that there's a huge backlog out there and I know commitments have been made to develop more of these, more child-care spaces across the province. Do we have any indication as to whether or not the number that you have committed to is going to be enough because we certainly hear the waiting list in excess of 10,000, and I can tell you many people did not leave their names there. They simply look at the list and say this is unrealistic, I'm not counting on the list, I'll find my own child care. So that probably understates the need in a significant way. What further initiatives are going to be necessary to deal with child care which is a pressing need, not only in urban areas but in rural areas too?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I would encourage you, when you're speaking with your community members and they go online, that they leave their name on there. It's based on specific child-care centres. It's going to ensure that we have a more accurate number. So if you hear that comment, I would say, please, put your name back on because we are going to monitor how we are succeeding in our strategy.

This recent commitment that we've made, it's going to make a difference. Is it going to address the number of children that are on the child-care registry? You know the answer to that. We're going to have to rely on a multitude of strategies in making sure that we are providing good quality child care for Manitobans. We know that it is closely linked to our employment strategy and we also, I have to say, stay tuned; we just concluded a consultation this fall and stay tuned.

\*(15:30)

**Mr. Wishart:** I'm certainly aware of the consultation and had a number of people come to the office and want to be sure that this process would be well heard. And I have to report to the minister that a number of people indicated they did not leave their names on the list. So I think you can pretty much speak with confidence—of course, there is the time-lag issues with child care always—but you can be very confident that that number is an understatement by a significant margin.

However, I will certainly share my—or your comments with those people and encourage them to go back online, add their names to the list, but when they see a backlog of that size, they tend to be discouraged and look for other alternatives. And in some communities there are some other alternatives available, and certainly family's been pressed into place in many cases.

So I'll leave it at that. I know my colleague had a question in this area as well.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Related to child-care spaces, the Auditor General, in a recent report, indicated that, despite the fact the government had publicly made an announcement about funding all these new spaces, that, in fact, there were 1,400 spots that the money did not flow to. And, in asking the deputy minister about that at a Public Accounts Committee, there was some indication—she didn't come out and say cuts or not enough money, but can the minister indicate why all these announcements have made about extra spots but almost 14, or it was maybe over 14, did not actually see dollars flow?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** What I'd like to put on the record is in 2006 and 2007 there were 26,375 spaces. In 2012-2013 we now have 31,634 spaces. So we have seen an improvement in five years in those spaces.

There's a combination of things that happen in the child-care area with funded and unfunded spaces, but I will need to check for the member. I think one of the other indicators there are we are often relying on volunteer boards to build new facilities, and sometimes there are issues that arise that are no one's fault at all. They might be just getting permits or finding the land, and so that also could be a factor there. But I'll look into that and provide that back to you.

**Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West):** To the minister, on page 16, there's a graphic or area there discussing the east-side road without any discussion leading up to it or following it. What's the purpose of this particular document in this particular—or this page in this document?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** What this section is referring to are supports and initiatives that are specific to Aboriginal people living in poverty. The east-side road is a very large commitment that our government has made to address accessibility for individuals living on the east side. We see it as not only a tourism strategy, but it is also an employment and a training strategy. Job creation is happening. There

are community benefit agreements that have been developed for individual communities, and in those community benefit agreements, that is helping support the issue of poverty.

I—we cannot leave this out. This is a significant investment by our government to support the communities of the east side, and I'm very proud of that commitment. And we'll continue to watch as this progresses, and I'm very confident that we will see more growth in the east-side communities as we open it up and people participate in the ecotourism in which we hope to see develop.

**Mr. Helwer:** There's a reference there to the March 31st, 2013, and the \$45 million in the next line, was that spent during that fiscal year, or when was that money expended?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** That would be since the initiative has begun.

**Mr. Helwer:** So over how many years would that \$45 million have been spent?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** That I will have to get back to you on.

**Mr. Helwer:** All right. Of that \$45 million, how many—how much of that has actually gone into physical road construction?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I would suggest that that would have to be referred to the East Side Road Authority. I think, for the purpose of this report, we've identified the east-side road as a particular initiative that is going to be providing opportunities for Aboriginal people on the east side: employment, training opportunities, the community benefit agreements and also long-term commitments as we see the development of ecotourism.

**Mr. Helwer:** Well, it's easy to say that I should go speak to somebody else, but when you, you know, record this type of information in detail, one would expect that there would be a backup to follow up that detail and that you could answer the questions of that regard. You know, it's—simple question is how much was spent on physical construction of the road.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I am the Minister of Family Services and proudly the Minister of Family Services. I have worked very hard to answer these very broad questions today, and I do not apologize if I want to make sure that you get accurate information. I do not apologize about having to say I will take it under consideration and I will provide you with that information. And you can ask your

colleague that the information will flow to you, and you will have it.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Can the minister clarify something for me? It indicates that in 2009, that the government supported approximately 34,957 units of social and affordable housing and that the above figure includes personal-care home beds. Why are personal-care home beds included in social housing?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I refer the member to the same page, page 18, but the indicator of the baseline gives us that explanation about why that measure is there. Manitoba Housing uses that measure because they are providing support to 4,000 individuals living in personal-care homes, so that is—there is a support that is being provided to them, and that is also considered part of our social housing count.

**Mrs. Driedger:** And when did the government start to include counting personal-care home beds in that number?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I will get that information to you.

**Mr. Wishart:** And I wanted to go back to the section No. 15, Children in care. And as is indicated in there, that between the period of 2008 and 2013 we've seen a fairly significant increase in the number of children in care here in Manitoba. And, of course, we're all very concerned when children have to be either taken away from families or supports have to be added to those families. And this has been a fairly large area of growth in the last 15 years or so. When—does the minister feel that—and one of the goals clearly of this initiative, ALL Aboard, is to provide as much support as possible to the family and the child in their home—in their birth home. Does the minister feel that we have done enough or that this program will accomplish enough so that that continued increase will change?

\* (15:40)

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** We know that the statistics that are provided that poverty plays a role in children that are in care, and so I am working very diligently to see that this initiative will provide better supports for families, which includes the parents and children, and while building strong families and stronger communities, we—the goal is that we'll see less children in care.

**Mr. Wishart:** So I would assume from your minister's comments then, that she agrees with me—this would be one of the measures that we should certainly look for a reduction in this number to

indicate that we're having some level of success, in terms of dealing with poverty.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I would suggest that choosing an indicator, No. 15, which is children in care, demonstrates that.

**Mr. Wishart:** But so far the trend has been in the other direction, Madam Minister, even though money of these programs have been in place—and we talked about that earlier—as policies since 2009.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** Oh, I'm sorry, I—

**Madam Chairperson:** Honourable Minister.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** Well, I'd ask him to please repeat that question.

**Mr. Wishart:** That we've had programs and initiatives since 2009 that would help to deal, or were targeted to help deal with poverty issues, and yet we've still seen an increase during that period of time. How do you reconcile those two things?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I'd certainly like to correct the record, that we've had poverty initiatives happening within this government since 1999, and we will continue to make those commitments.

Poverty is just one of those indicators of children in care. I'm not sure if the member is suggesting that if a child is at risk that we should leave them with their family. We have individuals, agencies and authorities that are working in our communities and making those assessments, and we have to trust the assessments of those workers. We do believe, though, by dealing with the issue of poverty, which includes better affordable housing, education, child care and overall support for families, we're going to build stronger families that are going to raise healthy kids and that we are going to build stronger communities.

**Mr. Wishart:** Clearly, no one's suggesting that a child at risk should be left anywhere—on either side of the House. But this initiative, in terms of trying to deal with family supports, has a history with your government, of which you're very proud, and you made a number of references to—over the past years that you have spent more money and this was all targeted to this area. And, yet, this one indicator is pretty clear in that we still have a trend in the wrong direction.

When do you think we will start to see a change in the—regards to this trend, and what new initiatives might be necessary?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** We will see a change in this trend when the agencies and the authorities we work with are confident that children are safe in their family home and do not see the need to apprehend. That's when we will see the change in that.

We have a number of programs and policies that support families throughout the province, and I know that all members of the House want to see this number reduced, and we're going to work towards that. But as we're working towards that, we're going to make sure that the actions we take are in the best interest of the child. I think this government's commitment of—in choosing this as an indicator is extremely brave. This is an indicator, as many of the other indicators, have very many variables that we have no control over.

And, as we move forward, we are going to continue to provide supports for families. We are going to continue to make those investments into the communities and address the issues. And I won't apologize for that. And I also will trust the individuals that are in these front lines, meeting with the families, making the plans. When you see this number, you have to also take into account that there are thousands and thousands of children and families that are working every day with agencies, social service agencies, and finding that we are able to provide them with the supports so they can stay at home. We're going to continue to do that. But, as we continue to do that, we're also going to make investments in poverty. And we believe that as we make investments in poverty, families get stronger and communities get stronger, that we're going to continue to monitor the incidence of children in care.

**Mr. Wishart:** Thank the minister for those comments.

Talking about chronic disease situation, and there's certainly lots of studies out there, not the least of which was the one done by the University of Manitoba on Manitoba Housing residents that indicates it's pretty unhealthy to be poor in this province, and it does have some regional differences as well.

One of the areas that—and it's nice to see there's a little progress being made in respiratory diseases, but we see some problems, and in particular in relation to diabetes and particularly some dramatic regional issues as well. What initiatives specific out of this combination of supports have been targeted towards dealing with the near epidemic in diabetes in some rural areas?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** Well, we have a number of initiatives, and as I speak about diabetes, I'm throwing on my Healthy Living hat about the initiatives that we did, we focused a lot on prevention programs. And I think the commitments that we've made for our QuickCare clinics, making sure that we're working towards every Manitoba having access to a family physician, those are making commitments, ensuring that we are providing information about healthy living, about education and nutrition—that's going to make a difference.

We know that there is a health inequality for individuals living in poverty, and we believe that this is an extremely important initiative. I had the opportunity yesterday to be speaking with folks in Family Services who have 'talken'—have spoken about our primary care initiative partnership with the regional health authorities. And in those partnerships, one of the direct outcomes will be to look at health inequality and find out what we can do to address that. So we have seen some progress, we have more work to do and we're committed to doing that.

I'd just like to put a plug in for the reduction of the respiratory diseases. I think one of the factors—there's many factors in that, but our robust program about reducing tobacco usage has been one of those outcomes, and there has been one specific to Manitoba Housing which we provided support to individuals and also have seen—I think that has helped contribute to that reduction as well.

**Mr. Wishart:** I appreciate the comments by the minister, though certainly the numbers in terms of diabetes continue to grow and we've seen really no indication that we've reached any critical point in that increase yet. And I think, actually, it's very much related to food security and food supply and quality, which we talked about a little earlier.

The respiratory disease is one, is quite interesting, particularly when you do the urban-rural comparison and discover it's suddenly—and we were in a far poorer situation in terms of urban—or rural rather, in terms of numbers. And it's—we've seen the greatest improvement in—actually, in that area, which is surprising when you look at it; it might be a geographical issue.

I know my colleague from River Heights had a few questions.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Yes, I have a question on diabetes, but I want to start with a more

general question. You've chosen 21 indicators. One of the indicators that I would have expected to be there would be the proportion of Manitobans attending food banks because they didn't have enough food. And I'm asking, you know, why was that not one of the indicators that you looked at?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** The indicators that we 'perdo'—or that we have used or chosen, are all public indicators. For that statistic, that is managed by a individual organization, so we wanted some transparency in the numbers.

\* (15:50)

**Mr. Gerrard:** You're suggesting that the government doesn't produce those numbers and therefore that you're not going to use those, whereas if the government is producing the numbers, they are now public numbers and they are okay to be used?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** What I'm saying is that we have focused on Statistics Canada data. I'm not saying anything about the information that the food bank gathers. I'm saying that this is the suite of indicators that we chose. You know that we watch those numbers. When we get the hunger report out, we're monitoring that as well, and I think you're familiar that David and I have been working very closely on the childhood hunger round table and we will continue to do that work.

Just for the record, I'd like to say that—the access to a food bank has reduced by 5.1 per cent in the last hunger report, that we're not satisfied with that. We still have a number of Manitobans that rely on that service and we need to continue to work with all of our partners and work to reduce that number as well. As David will tell you, he sees his job as working himself out of work, and we'll continue to help support him in that.

**Mr. Gerrard:** The last hunger report that I have shows that, on a per capita basis, we have the second highest proportion of people using food banks in all of Canada and that over time since the government came to power in 1999 we've had the largest increase in food bank use of any. So I think it's important to have some balance in terms of how those numbers are presented. Would the minister, if this was gathered by Statistics Canada, would be—the minister be ready to incorporate it?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** We would certainly take it under consideration. We'll be—would be working with our ALL Aboard Committee, which includes community members as well as elected officials, and

make that evaluation as we look at the indicators. And I think there's also opportunities when we go out and complete community consultations to have conversations about not only the action plans but also the indicators that we have chosen.

**Mr. Gerrard:** I note that, of the 21 indicators, that 14 of those are in some percentage in reference to the number of—the amount—number of people in the population or what have you, but that seven of them are just numbers, numbers which would likely increase provided that there continues to be some increase in population. The total units of social and affordable housing, the new households served through the MHRC programs, participation in adult learning centres, the average weekly earnings, the minimum wage rates, the number of people per month receiving co-ordinated home-care service, number of people using access centres, those are all numbers which would likely be expected to increase so long as the number of people in Manitoba increases.

It just seems to me that the government has chosen to use seven indices which, you know, are not on a proportionate population basis and therefore are, you know, likely to come out favouring the government unless it's an extraordinarily bad year. Would the minister consider using numbers in these areas which expressed the results as a proportion of the population?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** What we are doing is we are relying on our other partners in other departments that are gathering the information and sharing with us, and that is how they gather that information on those particular seven indicators. We'll certainly take your comments under consideration and continue to have a conversation about how do we demonstrate the outcomes of those indicators.

**Mr. Gerrard:** I'm a little concerned about the claims about the poverty rates, and I have in front of me a report that was prepared by Dr. Sid Frankel, and he is somebody who is not only objective and an academic and looks very carefully at what he presents, but he's showing that the—whether you use the mask—market basket measure or the after-tax low-income measure or the after-tax low-income cut-off, that the proportion of people living in poverty has increased from 2008 to 2011 and that, in comparison to Canada, we haven't done as well in addressing poverty in Manitoba. And so I'm concerned about the presentation of the numbers as the minister has provided them.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** The numbers that I provided are based on how we are doing our comparison, and I will stand beside them.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Numbers based on, you know, statistics Manitoba or Statistics Canada? I note that Mr. Frankel's, or Dr. Frankel's, numbers are based on Statistics Canada numbers, and I just want to check and see whether there's a possibility that it's another argument over statistics between the province and the federal government.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I'd suggest that the member turn to page 34 where these numbers have been published. We're not hiding anything. It's right there.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Dr. Frankel's numbers will be apparently published very shortly so we'll be able to have a look, but I note as well that the under-18 poverty rates are, you know, depressingly in the wrong direction and even more so.

One of the things that I did want to ask you about, and that is on page 14 of the report, there's a look here at the percentage of the population living in low income and there's a reference to all Manitobans and there's a reference to off-reserve Aboriginal Manitobans, and I'm just trying to understand why it was just off-reserve Aboriginal Manitobans. Are people who are living in First Nations communities not included in the overall figures or what's happened?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** This, again, is a Stats Canada suite of information so you'll have to have that conversation with them about how they acquire their information.

**Mr. Gerrard:** I'll certainly, you know, look into that and see what I can find out. One of the things that I note is that the Broadbent Institute did a very careful analysis across all provinces of the effectiveness of governments in addressing social well-being of their citizens, and that notwithstanding that this is the Broadbent Institute and one would expect that it might be more sympathetic to the current government, they reported that Manitoba actually had the worst performance in terms of social well-being, and I wonder, you know, whether the minister would comment on that.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I think that I need to take some time and to review what you're referring to. I know that we have been committed to social inclusion and providing opportunities for all Manitobans since 1999 and we're going to continue to do that. And I'm confident with our measure, our sense of

community belonging, that with those investments that we will see some indication of success with those commitments.

\* (16:00)

**Mr. Gerrard:** You know, one of the measures which traditionally has been pretty important in addressing people on low income is the Employment and Income Assistance Program, and I note—I have here the employment assistance rate review done in the fall of 2013, and it's put out under the Province of Manitoba, but it's not clear to me which department or who actually did this report because there's no name on it. I wonder if the minister could help me understand who did this report and where it was done.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** It was done in collaboration between Jobs and Economy and Family Services.

**Madam Chairperson:** The hour being 4 o'clock, I would like to know what the will of the committee is.

**Mr. Wishart:** Madam Chair, we would like to continue, so we will review this in another hour.

**Madam Chairperson:** Thank you very much.

I have been advised by the Clerk of the committee that we do have another committee meeting at 6, so I just wanted to remind members of that. Thank you.

**Mr. Gerrard:** In this report, one of the recommendations—and I'll read it out—talks about that the Employment and Income Assistance Program is in need of reform, and I think many of us have recognized that for a long time. And I'm just wondering whether a major reform of Employment and Income Assistance is on the horizon as part of this—the government's ALL Aboard strategy. *[interjection]* I'm just asking whether this document says—which deals with Employment and Income Assistance Program—says specifically that the system is in need of reform.

**An Honourable Member:** You're asking questions on the wrong report, Jon.

**Mr. Gerrard:** No, no, no, but I'm just asking about the ALL Aboard poverty strategy—right—because Employment and Income Assistance is a very important part of an approach to poverty—whether in fact, as part of the poverty strategy, there will be envisaged a major reform of Employment and Income Assistance.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I think that you know when you read the EIA rate review that you've—saw the four

recommendations at the end of that report that talked about our commitment to looking at doing business differently, and that is exactly what's going to be happening. Our ALL Aboard reporter will not dictate to other departments or programs what they should or shouldn't be doing. We'll be working with them in partnership. So you know that the EIA rate review report—you know that you saw that there was a conversation about how do we streamline services for individuals and looking at the disability pension program as an alternative. So those are extremely significant changes that are under review right now.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Yes, you know, this document talks about, you know, increases to financial transfers to Employment and Income Assistance recipients should take the form of higher benefits outside of Employment and Income Assistance that support low-income Manitobans more broadly and avoid reinforcement of the welfare wall.

And so, I'm just—first of all, want to again, because this is a pretty important matter when we're talking about poverty issues—how the minister sees the welfare wall and why there is still a welfare wall under her government after 14 years.

**An Honourable Member:** You will see that there are a number of initiatives that we are doing to support individuals and when we are doing these initiatives, it is about removing those barriers, and that's about education, creating employment, making sure that we're providing child-care opportunities, making sure that we have affordable housing. Those actions that we are taking are reducing that welfare wall. You're correct in saying that the barriers continue to exist, but under this government, those barriers have been reduced, and we are committed to continue to work to reduce them even further.

And I know that many of the advocates would challenge us for having this conversation about the welfare wall and suggest that we need to talk about what is the outcome for individuals that are living in poverty, and that's what this document focuses on, is how do we move people from poverty to have a lifestyle that we want for many Manitobans and do that in a supportive and encouraging way.

And I'm confident with this plan of addressing the 21 indicators that we are going to work with all of our partners, our government partners, on the non-profit sector and the business, and that we are going to continue to move forward.

**Mr. Gerrard:** One of the critical things is many, many reports, not only in Manitoba but in wide

variety of jurisdictions of import—have related, is the importance of ensuring that people have housing and that people have enough for basic nutrition and other support.

And in the case of housing, many, many organizations in Manitoba have recommended that there be an increase in the shelter rate. And part of the reason for that is that it's very hard for people to get adequate nutrition for their children if they have to use the money that's destined for the food for their kids in order to pay the rent. And this document would suggest that the government has no intention of looking at increasing the shelter rates, and I'm just wondering if that indeed is the case.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** What you've heard me say time and time again is that we are looking at ensuring that we provide individuals with portable benefits. And when you spoke to me just a question ago about the welfare wall, it is important that we have portable benefits such as RentAid that will move with the individual.

It is important that we continue to build more social housing, that we continue to invest in the social housing that we have. It's important that we continue to provide training and employment opportunities for Manitobans. That's what our focus is. We know the best way out of poverty is a good job and an education, and that's the direction we're going to go.

**Mr. Gerrard:** One of the big concerns is that children who are in poor families are getting adequate nutrition, and, indeed, adults. And, you know, when mothers or fathers have to take the money for their food from their kids to pay the rent, it makes it very difficult.

I was, for example, at a seminar this morning which talked about research that was being done on obesity in Manitoba, and pointed out that one of the major issues here was the quality of food that's available to people who are poor. And the result being that we have higher incidence of obesity and a higher incidence of diabetes, because we're not, you know, putting forward programs which actually allow people who are poor to have adequate nutrition for their children and for their families.

And I would, you know, ask the minister once again why she is not going to ensure that there is more adequate shelter rates so that the food money for the kids can actually be used on food for their kids, so that they have adequate food.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** What we are doing in regards to providing more food security for families, is we have our food security action plan, and that really is focusing on improving access to nutritious food.

There's a number of community groups that we work with that provide that support. I've spoken to you about the childhood hunger round table—those are examples. The Winnipeg Food Share Co-operative is one of those examples. The nutritious—the breakfast programs that we have within our child care—some of our child-care facilities in some of our schools, are also examples. When we rolled back and gave back to the families, the national childhood benefit, that made a difference.

I can show you statistics that talk about the benefits—the net provincial benefits for individuals that have increased since 1999, that are portable for the individual.

\* (16:10)

So, again, I will say that we have partnerships with many groups, that we are continuing to look at initiatives such as RentAid as one of those tools that are portable and will move with the individuals. And as we are doing that we will also look at employment and education and training opportunities and build more social housing.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Let me move to the licensed child care, and, you know, the goal, from what we can see, is that there just be some level of increase in licensed child-care spaces. It's not that the need and the demand be met and not that we would reduce the wait times. In September, I attended a workshop put on by the Child Care Coalition, and they pointed out that in Manitoba, compared with Quebec, you know, we have less than half the number of spaces per population as they do, and so we're way behind. And they talked about the fact that under this government there's a crisis in access to child care. And it seems that part of this is not actually setting the target, you know, where it needs to be set. Would the minister consider setting a target which is more adequate?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** We have set a target with our Family Choices, and I can demonstrate to you that we have increased the child-care spaces and that we will continue to do that. I asked the other member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart) to stay tuned because there is a consultation that has just concluded and we are working on a new strategy, and I think that you'll be very interested when you see that. And we need to continue to



ensure that we're providing affordable child care. The investments that we've made as far as capital are record breaking for this province. The investments that we've made towards the workforce are also—have been important as far as retention and training and also the number of spaces that we've committed to and the number of spaces that have opened up.

We have more work to do. Nobody is saying that our job is done. We know that. And that's why we went out on the consultations and continue to hear the voices of many parents and many professionals and educators in the province.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Let me just make a comment on the issue of the numbers of children in care. Notwithstanding the minister's stated goal, the number of children in care under this government is essentially very close to doubling. And that's a long way from the intended direction as we understand it, and clearly there's a need for a different direction.

I also want to comment on the post-secondary participation rates. It's rather surprising that the post-secondary education participation rate is going down. Now, it's not a lot, but, I mean, one would have expected that it would be going up in a very significant fashion given the importance of post-secondary education. And, you know, one would, I think, have expected that it would be going up given, you know, what we know about a major effort of the University of Winnipeg and very big increases in participation there.

*Mr. Vice-Chairperson in the Chair*

And it seems to me that, you know, there's a real issue that this government is not adequately addressing in terms of post-secondary education participation. And I wonder if the minister would comment about, you know, whether there's an intention to turn this situation around or just let it be.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** Well, as I explained that we have shown a commitment with our advanced education strategy which provides support to the colleges and the universities across the province. We have also provided bursary opportunities as well as ensuring that we have a robust apprenticeship program in our colleges. So there are opportunities for young people that want to access post-secondary, and we'll continue to provide good quality education for those individuals that want to access it. We know, and I've stated time and time again, that education is one of the ways out of poverty and we are going to continue to make those investments.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Has the minister any indication that the number of people on low income, that the proportion attending post-secondary education has increased at all?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I'm not familiar with that specific statistic, but we can talk to advanced education and see if they have access for it.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Would appreciate if the minister could follow up and let me know, and, you know, that completes my questions. Thank you.

**Mr. Wishart:** Mr. Chairman, and I did want to touch once more on the 21 indicators and it seems like an odd number; why was that number of indicators chosen and what was the process in deciding which indicators you would use?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** As I spoke initially when we were developing the strategy and the legislation that we spent almost a year, I think, doing consultations with a variety of community groups, and one of the those consultation groups was about indicators. And so we sat with community advocates and had a conversation about what would a suite of indicators look like. So there was a list that was produced, and that list was categorized and then, as it was categorized, it was presented to the ALL Aboard Committee, which at that time also included government representatives as well as community representatives, and the 23 indicators were approved.

**Mr. Wishart:** Well, thank you, Madam Minister, and that gives us some background as to why the ones that are in here—because frankly there are times we wonder why it's—one thing was chosen and not another.

And there are—it's difficult to reconcile some of the indicators' fairly rosy reports with what we're seeing in reality, and one of those realities would be 20 per cent of the children in this province living in poverty. That's 54,000 children.

How do you reconcile some of these numbers with the numbers that are mentioned there and things like the food bank usage?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I think as we're looking at the implementation of the ALL Aboard strategy that we know it's a complex issue, we know that there is not just one particular initiative that is going to improve the living conditions, that it has to be a comprehensive approach, and that's what these indicators also demonstrate.

But you have to realize that these are our 21 indicators for this specific report—doesn't mean that we do not acknowledge other statistical information that will be coming our way over the year. We will continue to monitor other measurements. But for this purpose, which I must say is very bold of a government, to come up with 21 indicators and have a conversation about what's happening and with our commitment of reducing poverty.

**Mr. Wishart:** Thank the minister for that answer.

And she might want to correct her earlier answer, where she actually did say 23 indicators, and I believe the number is 21. Is that correct?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I will correct it; it is 21 indicators.

**Mr. Wishart:** Mr. Chairman, and some reference was made by the member from River Heights to the increases in food bank usage. And over the last five years our increased usage of food banks here in Manitoba has been the greatest in Canada, at 48.8 per cent, which is quite concerning. And we touched, perhaps, briefly on one of the causes with the housing allowance being—not having changed during that time, and forcing people to make the really tough decision of whether they have a roof over a head—their heads or food on their table and pushing more of them to food bank usage.

\* (16:20)

And the minister indicated that the reason she hadn't used food bank usage numbers was because they were not official government figures in any form. And yet there are references in here to consulting groups and social planning groups which are not official government figures as well. Why—are you that uncomfortable with the food bank usage numbers that you do not want to reflect on them?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** And in the mood of correcting people, I would suggest that the reference that you made to the Social Planning Council and the other groups, that they are not part of our indicators. Of the 21 indicators, they are not a part of that. As I said earlier, we are focusing on Statistics Canada information on this for the ALL Aboard strategy, but we are not turning a blind eye to other research information that comes throughout the year, and we will have individuals that will continue to monitor those statistical findings regarding poverty and we will continue to see how they can inform us as we move forward in implementing our action plans to reduce poverty.

**Mr. Wishart:** Well—and I thank the minister for the correction—it is true the social planning councils were not used specifically for the indicators, but information and charts from them were used in the report. It would have been nice to see indications from the poverty report and the hunger report used as well. And are you uncomfortable with those numbers? Is that why you're not using them?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** As I spoke earlier, that we chose the 21 indicators in collaboration with community members, and in choosing those we felt that these were the ones that really sort of painted a picture about the complex issue of poverty and the number of impacts that poverty has on individuals and on families, but also measurements of if we see improvement in these numbers, we believe that the outcomes for individuals have improved.

**Mr. Wishart:** Well, I certainly would encourage the minister to do more than monitor them and make them part of their report in the future because they would be very good indicators. Of the 60,000-plus that use food banks in Winnipeg, about 47 per cent of those are our children, which seems an appallingly high rate, but then when you look back at the 20 per cent of children living in poverty, maybe that explains a fair bit of that.

But every month Winnipeg Harvest alone feeds about 30,000 children, and that's—in the last 10 years that's up from 5,500. And that's a pretty obvious trend. I would like to see that type of—some type of acknowledgement that, clearly, we have a problem in this area and we skipped over, frankly, skipped over food security and really got very little satisfaction in terms of where your plan will take you. But—great to have a plan for the future, but if you're not eating today, the future's a long way away.

*Madam Chairperson in the Chair*

So when will the minister include in this report and certainly take the recommendation back to the committee, I would hope, to include these kind of numbers in future reports?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I'd just like to put on the record for the member that the action plan for food security—I guess this would be page 1—reports directly from the Manitoba food bank or the Food Banks Canada, their report, so we value their information. We've included in our action plan the fact that since 1999 we've been involved in a number of initiatives, the fact that when the child hunger report—the hunger report came out and we brought together a number of individuals

to address the issue of childhood hunger and have come up with some ideas and some solutions. That is taking action.

I know that it is important that, as we move forward, that we continue to look at different initiatives to improve food security, whether it's in the school system, whether it's in the community, and truly understand what do those numbers mean. I can list off a number of initiatives. You're familiar with our community gardening program that's happening in the North. Again, food insecurity is related to—again, it's a direct indicator of poverty. We need to make sure that we're providing individuals that opportunity to move from poverty, and I think that's a way that we can address it.

**Mr. Wishart:** Well, you're clearly comfortable with using your information but not using their numbers and working with them, which is at least a step in the right direction. But I would certainly encourage you to take a recommendation back to the rest of your members of the committee, that you look more closely at including food bank usage as one of the indicators of poverty in this province, which it very clearly is.

Now, my colleague, I know, had a few questions as well.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Madam Chair, page 52 of the strategy, I just would like some clarification from the minister—indicate—and this is about home-care services. And it was showing that in 2008-09 that 32 and a half thousand people were served with home care, and then 2011-12, it was about 31.4. Am I correct in reading this, that 1,026 less people have been treated in the home-care area in that period of time?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** So, what I can tell you about the statistical information that we're looking at is that in these categories that there are people that are double counted that are receiving multiple services. And we also have other new services that have been recently initiated through Health that have—also providing support to individuals in their home.

I want to add, though, as the member sort of looks confused and concerned, that had we privatized home care as you had suggested, the access to the program would've been absolutely abysmal. So we need to make sure that when we are looking at this information that we are seeing that people are accessing the service, that they are getting a continuum of service, multiple kinds of services to

meet their needs and to stay at home in a safe environment.

So I can also have a conversation with Health and get some more clarification for you on these numbers, and I will commit to do that.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Thank you, because the comments by the minister just don't fly right now. Whether you're double counting or not, then you're putting erroneous information here, because what you're indicating is that 32 and a half thousand people were serviced in 2008, and now it's down to 31 and a half. That's a thousand less people. You don't indicate anywhere double counts or anything, so what these numbers are really then aren't accurate, because you haven't properly indicated, you know, any of that information. But, even though there's a drop of a thousand people being seen, according to your own numbers, you're saying in your report that it's increased by 4.8 per cent since the strategy was put in motion. That is not accurate, according to your own document. So how can the minister reconcile what she's trying to say versus what is actually on paper?

\*(16:30)

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** What I'm saying is that the member should look at the footnote that says some clients may be receiving services in multiple categories. That is an indicator of what is happening here.

As well, I'd like to also make sure that on the record it is demonstrated that in 1999, 20,000 individuals were using the service and in 2011, 31,000, so, there is an 11,000 increase. So that has happened, but I will get clarification about what these numbers mean, but what this is saying to us is that we are providing a quality service to individuals and they are accessing it at home.

**Mrs. Driedger:** And I would expect the numbers to go up and I'm surprised, actually, that they aren't even a bit higher based on the baby boomers hitting the system and our age demographic, so absolutely, in the last—more than a decade, 15 years, that number should be certainly high but it isn't necessarily clear the way the government has represented this. And just probably some more clarification would help.

Now, the minister, interestingly enough, has just been raving about really good quality co-ordinated home-care services. I'd like to ask the minister, does the government track how many attendants do not show up to look after their client in home care? Is that tracked by anybody in the system to support

the fact she's saying they're receiving co-ordinated home-care service? When I'm on the phone right now talking to somebody who hasn't had—in about 28 days has had about 19 no-shows, how is that—and that's just one patient in the system—how can the minister, then, go on saying what she's saying about co-ordinated quality care when we've got, actually, probably some pretty serious issues out there right now? And I had a personal opportunity to experience a number of these for quite a while. There are a lot of no-shows. A lot of home-care visits are not being made. How much is the government tracking how often that is occurring?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** What I can comment on—I cannot comment on the specifics, I'll take that under advisement and forward that question to the Minister of Health (Ms. Selby)—but what I can say, and I think you started to look at, on page 51 and the number 19, the average monthly number of people receiving co-ordinated care, we know that it's almost near 3,000 more Manitobans are receiving co-ordinated home-care services in 2011-2012 than were in 1999. That's significant and that totals over 24,000 people accessing the service in '11-12—so, for the record.

**Mrs. Driedger:** For the record, not to get picky on it, but when you've got 18 no-shows in 27 days, that's not a very co-ordinated home-care system.

A question for the minister: You're using one of the indicators as the number of people using access centres; has any evaluation been done as to whether or not having the access centres there and the people going to them has actually done anything to alleviate poverty?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I can assure you with my experience with the access centre and the dedicated personnel that are working there, and, again, that's a co-ordinated initiative between Family Services as well as the regional health authority providing those services, and under that umbrella there's, you know, social workers and nutritionists and nurse practitioners that are participating and home-care workers so we have a collective of individuals that are working and, as I had said earlier this afternoon, that I know that there is a commitment to look at health and—health inequality, and providing those services close to people that are living in poverty is going to make a difference.

The NorWest Co-op access centre is a really good example of a access centre that is located near people that are living in poverty and has a wonderful relationship with individuals and it's a very vibrant

access centre. I don't know if you've been there yet, but it—and very innovative in the programs that they are doing, whether it's around food security, primary health care and also community development work.

So I am very confident with access centres as our partner and with the individuals that are working there that we're going to be able to make some differences.

**Mrs. Driedger:** You know, it's fine to be confident, but what proof does the minister have behind that, you know, because she's saying a lot of the initiatives are just action-oriented, there's no targets placed on anything. If you don't have measurable incomes, how do you know that the access centres are actually making a difference? They're extremely expensive. Has a cost-benefit analysis ever been done so that you can actually see that there is an enormous patient benefit? And there very well might be, but I'm just asking the minister, back up what she's saying. Is there hard evidence to actually support what she's indicating?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** For the purpose of this report, we are monitoring the number of individuals that are accessing the centres. We know that the intention for the access centre was to make sure that it was a one-stop shop, that it was convenient, that it was supportive to families. The detail that you ask me, I cannot comment on that, so I'm going to have to take that under advisement.

**Mrs. Driedger:** In pillar 3, on strong and healthy families, there's an indication and a reference to the Manitoba Women's Health Strategy. Would the minister be able to send me a current copy of that strategy?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** As I said, I can't—I'll take that offer for you to the Minister of Health (Ms. Selby) and to the department and they'll be in contact with you, okay?

**Mrs. Driedger:** Can I add one more to that, then, the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative?

**An Honourable Member:** Yes.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Okay. And I think I probably only have one more question, and it goes back to a speech that the minister was making just this past year. And it was around this whole area, and I wonder if she could just clarify for us how, in this whole poverty strategy issue, how did her comments fit in about—and I'll just say—I'll put her words in quotation, and it is, quotation, ". . . and expanding life-saving STARS

helicopter ambulance to 24-hour service, seven days a week." End quote. What does that particular comment have to do with poverty reduction?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I think I'd like to know what speech you're referring to, and then maybe I could put it into some context, please.

**Mrs. Driedger:** It was on April 18th. It was some comments that you were making about poverty in the House. So it was made in the House, and you made some reference to the STARS helicopter, and I wasn't quite sure how that fit into the poverty reduction strategy.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I'm going to—this is the first that this has happened. I wondered—it's been 10 years—I wondered when the day would come that a person would say, in a speech, you said, and today's the day. It's a day of many firsts in my life. *[interjection]* I see you've got it highlighted too.

So I'm going to go back onto April 18th and see what else I said that day. But, really, if I am correct, I think that that speech was a speech that I was delivering in the House in a response to maybe the budget, and in that speech I talked about the things that we were doing as a government. And poverty is a complex issue, and access to good quality health care in emergency situations is one of those answers, and that's why I made that comment.

**Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson):** The minister has talked about many, many things that she wants to address and she's been basically using a shotgun approach. But I would like to know this: How many units has your PST tax credit encouraged to be built?

\* (16:40)

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** That was a question that I had received earlier this afternoon, and I had to inform the committee that since leaving Housing and Community Development, I have not had a briefing on that particular initiative and I have committed to get back to the member from Portage la Prairie, who I'm sure will share with you that information.

**Mr. Graydon:** You also spoke about refreshing social housing units. Would those be rural or urban?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** They're across the province, that there are a number have been renovated and using community forces. What we do when we make those decisions, because I think I know where you're going, is that we look at what's the—*[interjection]* where's the—where the—we needed a laugh today, didn't we? What we look at what's population, what's

the need in the community, and then we make those decisions on what we're doing.

Some of the other initiatives that we're doing across the province in rural areas is where there are surplus housing, we're looking at providing them to low-income individuals for sale. So if they're interested in the home ownership program, that we can develop that.

But again I must tell the member respectfully that my information on that is quite dated now, and so if you'd like specifics, I can take that to the minister of Housing and have that conversation.

**Mr. Graydon:** I thank the minister for that, and not only does she think she knows where I'm going, she'd like to—me to go. But at the same time, I would appreciate the information on where these have been done. If you could do that for me, I'd really appreciate it.

You did address this in another question, but I wondered how many units in the province that you have abandoned.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I'm not sure why you choose that word. What we do when we are developing social housing is we work with our community partners, and the social housing that we have now implemented and existing units that we have—we have—are working with municipalities and with community groups and looking at what are alternatives if people are not living in these units. In some communities the population has reduced; in some communities the population has increased. So we're trying to find that balance in ensuring that we're providing social housing opportunities for many Manitobans.

**Mr. Graydon:** Well, maybe the word was harsh, Madam Minister. Maybe that was a bit of a harsh word, but at the same time I think it's been pointed out to you in different areas where those houses have never been kept up all, nothing has happened to those houses in a number of years, and so I would suggest that they've been abandoned. What do you do with these properties then? And you can tell me that you put them up for sale, then tell me how many you've sold.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I will tell you that we have invested over the last few years \$100 million a year to make those improvements to the housing stock that we have. I will ask you to look what kind of investment was made in 1990, and I think you've heard me answer that question myself—zero. So we are making

those investments. There's a gap because there hadn't been any investment for 10 years, and we had to look at that and we had to build upon that and develop a strategy. We have many partners and it would be remiss if I did not mention the federal government is one of our partners when we are either building new housing or also the redevelopment of housing.

So if you have—and I think you do—a particular case that you would like for me to investigate, I'll certainly be in contact with the Minister of Housing and raise your concerns.

What we have done is when we have put a house for sale, it's important that we provide it to an individual who has an interest in being a homeowner but also is a low-income individual, because that was the intent when those homes were built, and so that's our priority.

**Mr. Graydon:** I would point out and be very clear that the minister is well aware of instances and places in southeastern Manitoba that she has seen herself, that there are no doors on those places. That was three years ago. How many of those places have been sold and how many of them have been renovated?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I'm reflecting on that tour that we took, and I think that you maybe not—I did not see any houses without doors.

**An Honourable Member:** Want to go again?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** No, thank you. I did not see houses without doors. I saw houses that the Department of Housing and Community Development were working with the municipality, trying to resolve an issue of water or sewer, and were going to be looking at what were the next steps that they were going to be doing.

So we can certainly continue to have this conversation and look at what we can do to improve the housing stock within the community that you speak and look at the sale of those properties, but we have a process that's in place.

**Mr. Graydon:** Can the minister indicate how many properties have been sold?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** As I had stated earlier, that my information on these topics is dated and I would not want to give—mislead you or give you inaccurate information. So, as I said, I will take that up with the Minister of Housing and Community Development (Mr. Bjornson) and we will develop a—get you the information.

**Mr. Graydon:** Just to put it on the record, there is—any of the properties that the minister may have saw had water and had sewer. There was no reason to negotiate with the municipalities; it was there. Those facilities were there. And there were no doors on the house. Some houses had no windows. So there wasn't even a moon on the front door on some of the houses.

So to go in a little different—and I know that she's tried to address this, and I struggle with it. I struggle with the priorities that have been identified for a number of years. And then when we take a look at what we're addressing, we're addressing one priority, is housing. And when we should have, in this report, we should have food security in here. Food security is crucial to the development of anyone who wants to become an active participant in our society as a work—in the workforce.

She also continues to go, we'll—we're going to be retraining, we're doing this and we're doing that with young people, but she has said very little about the seniors. And I don't think seniors really want to be retrained and try to be productive after they've retired.

So why was this food security not mentioned in this other than it's one of the priorities, the second priority? But it's very, very important to the outcome of dealing with poverty.

And I—when I look at the affordability for healthy food, clean water, community gardens and school nutrition, can she tell me where this is—there's a deficiency of these. Can she be more clear on that?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I'd like to correct the record, that there are seven priority areas that we have, and under those seven priority areas, there are 21 indicators which are used to measure those seven initiatives. Housing is only one of them, food insecurity is the second one, and when we did our consultation, those became 1 and 2.

We've made record investments in housing. We're working on food security with many of our partners in looking at how do we address access to good quality affordable fooding—food.

We have—Neighbourhoods Alive! has many food security initiatives. The Good Food Box is one of those examples. We have also the Food Share Co-op that is happening, the Community Food Centre at NorWest community. In the rural and northern areas, there's an initiative for community gardens. There are school nutrition

programs throughout the province. There's 170 that we do in partnership with non-profit organizations. So there is a whole range of services that are provided.

**Mr. Graydon:** Can the minister indicate where all of the consultations were—had taken place? She indicated some but not all. I think she indicates that there's six out of the 10. Can she be more specific?

\* (16:50)

**Madam Chairperson:** The honourable minister.

I recognized you.

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** Oh, sorry. Good thing I didn't say something.

So, in the What We Heard document, on page 16, we have a list of the communities in which we presented in. There were four in—five in Winnipeg, Dauphin, Brandon, Gimli and The Pas.

**Mr. Graydon:** So am I led to believe that there is no poverty south of No. 1 Highway?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** That is not what you are to believe; that there are opportunities for Manitobans all across the province, that they could submit written—there was written submissions, processes that happened as well, and many groups did do that.

**Mr. Graydon:** I would also submit to the minister that she had the opportunity to have consultation south of No. 1 Highway as well. At the same time, I would like to take a look at the graph on page 14, and perhaps she can give me a—maybe a little better idea on the—all Manitobans line runs pretty flat. The off-reserve Aboriginal Manitobans has quite a peak in '06, but we do know that there has been an aggressive approach by the minister and by the government to address poverty in the province of Manitoba, but it spiked in '06. And in '08, it dropped dramatically. And when she implemented a program or at least started to work with a program to present this here report today, in '09 it spiked. Can she give me some under—better understanding than what I have at this point why that took place?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** That would be the impact of the economic downturn that we saw in these numbers. But I acknowledge and thank the member for, you know, commenting on how we were able to

make some progress with the Aboriginal population. We have more work to do and, again, it leads very closely to opportunities of employment and education in our robust strategy to engage Aboriginal people in our economy.

**Mr. Graydon:** Just one question, and it's probably in here, but the minister would probably have it on the tip of her tongue. What is the percentage of the Aboriginals that are retired aged elders?

**Ms. Irvin-Ross:** I would hate to disappoint the member, but that is not on the tip of my tongue, and we will take that under consideration. And I'm not even sure if that statistic is gathered, so we'll—*[interjection]* Oh, it is? Okay. We will take that upon us and we will do your research and we will provide you with that information.

**Mr. Graydon:** I want to thank the minister for that, and I look forward to getting that information. I'll be in Winnipeg tomorrow.

**Mr. Wishart:** I would like to inform the Chair that we have exhausted our questions for the moment, and I know time is of the essence with that.

**Madam Chairperson:** I'd like to thank the committee members.

Hearing no further questions, shall the Annual Report of the Manitoba Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy (ALL Aboard) for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013, pass?

**Some Honourable Members:** Pass.

**An Honourable Member:** No.

**Madam Chairperson:** I hear a no. The report is not passed.

This concludes the business before us.

The hour being 4:54, what is the will of the committee?

**Some Honourable Members:** Rise.

**Madam Chairperson:** Before we rise, it would be appreciated if members would leave behind any unused copies of reports so they may be collected and reused at the next meeting.

Committee rise.

**COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 4:54 p.m.**

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