

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

Chairperson
Mr. Dennis Smook
Constituency of La Verendrye

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
Monday, December 10, 2018

TIME – 1 p.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

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

**VICE-CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Len Isleifson
(Brandon East)**

ATTENDANCE – 11 QUORUM – 6

Members of the Committee present:

Hon. Mr. Cullen, Hon. Mrs. Stefanson

*Messrs. Allum, Isleifson, Johnson, Johnston,
Lamont, Marcelino, Ms. Morley-Lecomte,
Mrs. Smith, Mr. Smook*

APPEARING:

Mr. Andrew Swan, MLA for Minto

MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

*Annual Report of the Manitoba Poverty Reduction
and Social Inclusion Strategy (All Aboard) for the
fiscal year ending March 31, 2018*

* * *

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

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

Are there any nominations?

Mr. Scott Johnston (St. James): I would 'nomilate'—nominate Mr. Ileifson [*phonetic*].

An Honourable Member: Isleifson.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Isleifson has been nominated.

Are there any other nominations?

Hearing no other nominations, Mr. Isleifson is elected Vice-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, 2018.

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

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Three—three o'clock?

Mr. Chairperson: Three o'clock has been suggested. We will revisit it at 3 o'clock, then?

An Honourable Member: Perfect.

An Honourable Member: Or until business concludes.

Mr. Chairperson: Does the honourable minister wish to make an opening statement?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Families): I do.

I just wanted to start off by thanking the department staff and all the work that they have done to help prepare us for today, and certainly for helping and advising me over the last little while there. They have a lot more knowledge and everything in many of these issues than I do, and I just thank them very much for all of their work and guidance and advice.

I want to thank also the committee, the Poverty Reduction Committee, that I've been working with over the last little while. I've had the opportunity to meet with them, just in the few short months that I've been in this position, three times now, and we have another meeting coming up. I think it's this week, if not maybe tomorrow, I think. So really looking forward to them.

And I just want to thank Dr. Stan McKay, Zully Trujillo, and Jennie Wastesicoot, as well as my colleagues, Minister of GET; Education; minister of—responsible for the Status of Women; and Indigenous and Northern Relations, who also sit on that committee.

So the last fiscal year has been full of activity and progress, so I'm eager to discuss the '17-18 poverty reduction annual report. Our government has taken many steps to help low-income Manitobans, and I'd like to share what we have done, including some of the highlights included in Manitoba's poverty reduction, social inclusion annual report.

In particular, I'm pleased to share that Manitoba is no longer the child poverty capital of Canada. In 2016, the child low-income rate fell by 27 per cent to 11.9 per cent, from 16.4 per cent the previous year, the largest decrease in child poverty in the country.

Additionally, the most recent low-income data available shows that overall poverty has decreased in Manitoba from 12 per cent in 2015 to 9.4 per cent in 2016, a 22 per cent decrease. We, of course, know that there's much more work to be done.

And our government knows that supporting children is the key in breaking the cycle of poverty. That is why we invested almost \$1 million in 2017-18 to provide 4.5 million meals and snacks to 20,000 students across the province, in partnership with the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba.

Between 2016 and '17 and '17-18, the number of children in care decreased by 3.6 per cent; the first time in over 15 years. We know more work has to be done by focusing on fewer children in care, stronger partnerships with families and communities, better co-ordination of services and greater public accountability.

In September this year, the Legislative Review Committee submitted its report, *Transforming Child Welfare Legislation in Manitoba: Opportunities to Improve Outcomes for Children and Youth*. The recommendations in the child-welfare report will help modernize The Child and Family Services Act to support a shift in practice and enable communities and families to have more influence on decisions.

Child-care fees in Manitoba are regulated. The fees paid by parents are the second lowest in the country. Our government invests \$4,572 per regulated child-care-centre space, which is higher than the Canadian average of \$3,405.

In fact, of all of the provinces and territories in Canada, Manitoba ranks in the top three for provincial allocations to child care. We continued to expand the number of child-care spaces in 2017-18; 607 new child-care spaces were added through capital projects in communities and schools.

To support affordable housing and low-income Manitobans, our government provides—provided \$30.5 million to support over 7,500 households on non-EIA Rent Assist, an increase of almost \$3.7 million over the previous year. An additional 25,000 households on EIA were supported through Rent Assist in 2017-18.

Investing in social housing is a priority, and the Department of Families is committed to providing quality housing to tenants, being a good neighbour, maintaining Manitoba Housing properties and contributing to community revitalization.

Our government continues to work with community partners to develop shared responses to homelessness, such as the Resource Assistance for Youth REST and ROOM projects, which provide 27 units of emergency and transitional housing for vulnerable youth, and the Manitoba Metis Federation in Brandon, to demonstrate the community-based delivery of rent subsidies to vulnerable families and individuals, including those participating in Housing First.

In addition to our annual support for homelessness initiatives, our government has made a funding commitment of \$3 million towards Siloam Mission's capital expansion project. This capital expansion will expand clinical space and create approximately 50 new shelter spaces.

In '17-18, Manitoba Housing's \$5.2-million support to homelessness initiatives across the province included homeless outreach mentors, Project Breakaway and emergency shelter assistance support services specific to youth.

The Manitoba government is focusing on improved job creation and ensuring that government programs are targeted, responsive and effective. Individuals who are newly entering or re-entering the labour market need to be supported to prepare for and successfully compete for available jobs.

The Department of Families is making changes to Employment and Income Assistance to create a modern, streamlined, client-centred program that will better and more appropriately serve individuals at all stages of work readiness, including those further from the labour market.

EIA participants are supported in plans that are tailored to their personal circumstances. For some, it means taking part in programming for personal or family wellness, such as addictions or life skills, while for others, it means enhancing their literacy or upgrading skill developments.

*(13:10)

Department of Families has piloted a rapid re-employment service model in Winnipeg at Jobs on Market. A number of services are being provided on site, such as job leads, resumé development and

potentially other important—or other employment assistance services. Plans are under way for the expansion of the Jobs on Market model to include services to participants residing in other communities in the province.

Since the launch of Jobs on Market in February 2017, 3,900 people have been served, and over 1,150 of these people are no longer dependent on EIA for financial assistance.

In 2017-18, Manitoba spent \$4.7 million contracting with social enterprise across the province. A variety of social enterprises provided training and employment opportunities for more than 200 individuals, helping them and their families move out of poverty.

Our government has already significantly reduced income taxes being paid by Manitobans by increasing the basic personal amount. This current year, it will be \$9,382; by 2020, the basic personal amount will be increased to \$11,402, entirely removing an estimated 11,100 low-income Manitobans from the tax rolls.

We have also committed to provide sustainable and predictable increases to Manitoba's minimum wage. Last year, we passed legislation to index minimum wage to the rate of inflation through a fully transparent formula. This results in improving wages for working Manitobans and providing predictability for businesses that create jobs and generate growth in our economy.

Manitoba's current indicators on poverty reduction and social inclusion show progress or stability in 17 out of 21 indicators. This progress is detailed in the annual report. Moving forward, we will continue working in partnership with community organizations, advocates and other governments to prevent and reduce poverty in our communities. Over the course of the last year, our government has been working to develop new poverty reduction strategy. We have been listening to Manitobans. The ideas and input provided by more than 2,000 Manitobans during consultations are being used to develop an inclusive, outcomes-driven strategy that includes key targets and meaningful measurement. The new strategy will be released in the near future. The strategy report will offer a plan to further reduce and prevent poverty with new indicators to measure progress, along with clear targets, and I look forward to preventing the new strategy shortly.

While our government continues our work at the provincial level, we will remain engaged with the

federal government to identify where we can best align federal and provincial poverty reduction efforts.

In conclusion, our government is committed to continuing the important work of co-ordinated poverty reduction in the province. We are humbled and honoured to serve the people of Manitoba, and we will continue to make decisions that support and improve the lives of the most vulnerable among us.

Thank you, and I look forward to discussing the annual report further.

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

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

Mrs. Smith: So we know the battle to fight and eradicate poverty is one of the most important duties we have here as legislators. We know that a lot of children end up in care due to being in poverty and some of the reasons that—some of the things that come with poverty.

This government, you know, has failed to produce a plan three years later, in a row, you know, to engage and fight poverty, which has meant that many families have, you know, been without safe housing—safe and affordable housing; children have gone into care, and we talk about, you know, reducing the amount of children in poverty.

I just want to put on the record that, you know, this current government has done nothing. It's been the federal government who's increased payments to families for their children that has helped lift those families out of poverty. So I just want to be clear about that, that we're making sure that the right people are getting, you know, the proper acknowledgement for that, that we're not taking acknowledgement for something that our government is currently not doing.

This failure is—on part of this government underlies why the work of this committee is so important. This 'comminee' provides an opportunity to 'examiss'—examine the various indicators of poverty and social inclusion to see how Manitobans are faring and to discuss ways that we can all improve.

As someone who grew up in poverty, was—lived with a single mother who had three children that worked more than one job, was on welfare at times in her life—you know, know full-handedly and, you know—and listening to the community that I'm very connected with in the North End of Winnipeg, that we get calls from daily, you know, looking for supports,

you know, whether that's supports through putting food in their fridge, or helping to keep their kids out of CFS care, or looking for a job because they've been laid off, or child care because they have an opportunity to have a job but there's no spaces available, or whether they're working one or two jobs because 'mimumin' wage has only been increased by two nickels by this province and then now by two dimes in this province, which isn't allowing people to get out of poverty. It's just keeping them in poverty.

I also want to thank, you know, the people who are on the front lines doing the work to help, you know, the many Manitobans look for ways to get out of poverty and look for resources that, you know, the government isn't providing, and helping to uplift those people that we see every day. We know that there's over 25,000 people struggling with meth right now on the streets of Manitoba, and we know that that's something that our province needs to tackle. And that, along, you know, comes with poverty. You know, people are trying to forget about their circumstances, to forget, you know, something that's happened to them. And certainly, you know, it takes away that other lived experience for a number of hours.

I also want to talk about, you know, the programs that have been cut that have helped many of our families who are experiencing poverty. One, in particular, the North End—or the North Point Douglas Women's Centre. Two years ago, they were receiving \$120,000 in funding from this government; now they are receiving zero dollars. This program was vital to this community in the sense that the women who were employed there were women who used that centre for support, whether it was getting out of a domestic relationship, looking for some job skills, going in and using a computer, going in to talk to a counsellor, or, you know, simply getting some experience in terms of volunteering at the centre.

If you speak to any of those women that worked there, they were—first they were people who frequented that centre, then they became volunteers, then they became board members; now they're working there. So that's a program, and there's many others I can talk about in this province that have been cut that do that very same work of uplifting and helping to bring people out of poverty.

So, when we're talking about, you know, long-term effects and really looking at how do we help create change, not just for one family, but for subsequential families, because I think about myself, like, I grew up in poverty; I was in a social program where I was able

to go back to school. I was supported. I got a job. Now my kids aren't in poverty. So, you know, we need to think long term and think about not just that one person but how do we, you know, end that cycle of poverty in helping to reduce the number of potential kids that are going to be, you know, down the road—that are experiencing this.

Children are still going to school hungry. I know you mentioned the nutrition program that schools do receive. It still isn't enough. You know we still see kids going to school hungry. They don't have lunches and, you know, that's not at the expense of their family, often. It's they don't have the funds to be able to do it. And other people are having to pick that up. And, you know, I know in my constituency we've asked businesses to support, but those are short-term things that we can be doing, but we need to think long term in terms of investing in our kids.

We need stronger supports for our kids in care. I mean, we can't continue to operate the way we are in, you know, the numbers increasing and, you know, it becoming, you know, this door that never closes, because when one kid goes in, the potential for their kids to continue going through that door is high. So we need to, somehow, you know, put better supports in investing in our future, which are our children.

* (13:20)

Child care, I know you mentioned child care. That's something we hear daily, you know, all across our constituents that, you know, there's 11,000 kids waiting on a list, or 17,000. And that's a high number. That's how many families that want to work or potentially have a job to go to that can't go back to their job because they don't have a space. So that ends up, you know, resulting in people living in poverty—so.

Yes, and I look forward to seeing the strategy report and figuring out we can work together to implement it, because I know we all want to end poverty in this province. We don't want to see any family or any kids, you know, going hungry and having to dumpster dive, which does happen; I can tell you that right now. People are going into dumpsters at restaurants and picking out food because they're hungry. You've heard it, you know, up north, where people are going to the garbage dump to look for food. I mean, no human being should have to do that.

So I look forward to today's discussion. I really hope that the minister is really listening to those voices and hearing the people who are out there that are experiencing this and not just people who are, you

know, perhaps at the top level of things and aren't really seeing what's going on at the ground level.

So miigwech.

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

Does the critic for the second opposition party have an opening statement?

Mr. Dougald Lamont (Leader of the Second Opposition): I just—I mean, like, the basic—I—we've been concerned about this because—I'm trying to determine—this is an annual report that refers to an inclusion strategy, but we don't actually know that there is a specific plan, unless this is it, that—to move forward.

There's been talk for a number of years about having a specific plan to achieve the—to reduce poverty, and in a meaningful way—because I know there was a previous committee which we attended, where the member from River Heights was present.

And, while there are numbers in here that refer to changes in the thousands, we're really talking about a huge number of people who are living in poverty in Manitoba that's in the tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands. So to have a really meaningful—recognizing that it is an enormous challenge that we need—that it's an enormous challenge that actually needs a really significant policy response.

And that's one of the concerns, is that, especially when it comes to—and part of it is an integration with a larger economic plan in terms of job growth, because there are a large number of people—when we talk about poverty, there are people who are living in poverty or EIA who might be, for a variety of reasons—that there's a large number of people on EIA who are mothers or single parents. There's a large number of people who have disabilities and are unable to work or unable to find paying work. But there are also large numbers of people who are working where you might have both parents in a family working, and they actually are still unable to make enough money because of a lack of—because wages are low, because it's difficult to find full-time jobs or full-time jobs with—and certainly full-time jobs with benefits.

And these are also some things that need to be considered in terms of poverty reduction, because I know that one of the areas that's been suggested is that there's going to be a strategy to help people get off EIA and to find jobs, when one of the entire reasons that it—that Manitoba has a high out-migration rate is that it's

actually difficult for people to find jobs at all. And that—too—say—the Manitoba employers report from earlier this year said that we still—despite some improvements, still have extremely—have some of the lowest wages. We've had high wage increases, but have the lowest wages in Canada.

So—and that there are—I think we need specific strategies in order to deal with not just the number of people who are poor, but that we have some extremely deep poverty, that—the previous Manitoba poverty health report card from—pardon me—from Make Poverty History reported that 50 per cent of families with two children, whether it was one or two parents, needed between 12 and 13 thousand dollars just to get up to—just to get up to—the poverty line, so that there was extremely deep poverty for some people and that we need a response to that as well.

And that's it. That's as far as—thank you for the opportunity to speak.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Smith: So we've noticed that the structure of the annual report, the Manitoba Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy, has changed. Specifically, it lacks much of the detail it previously had.

Will the minister speak to why the annual report has been altered and changed?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, first of all, I just want to thank the member opposite for her opening comments as well. And, you know, I've never believed that someone has a monopoly on good ideas when it comes to an issue as important as the eradication of poverty in a province, and I certainly welcome the dialogue and am very open to any suggestions or ideas that she has or, indeed, any Manitoban has, anyone at the table or beyond this. We welcome that. And that's why we have embarked on a pretty significant consultation process when it comes to developing that strategy, moving forward.

Certainly, when it comes to the annual report, I believe it's—it has the 21 indicators that are there, and certainly we continue to monitor those. We will be coming out very shortly with the new modernize—or with the new poverty reduction strategy as well, and we look forward to further dialogue at that time.

Mrs. Smith: Can the minister tell us who's involved in this strategy and who sits on this committee?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think I had mentioned in my opening statement, but I'm happy to mention again.

So it's a committee made up of a number of government ministers, including the Minister of Growth, Enterprise, Trade; the Minister of Education; the Minister responsible for Indigenous and Northern Relations; the Minister responsible for the Status of Women (Ms. Squires) and myself as the minister, as the fairly new Minister of Families, as well as Dr. Stan McKay and Ms. Zully Trujillo and Dr. Jennie Wastesicoot.

Mrs. Smith: That's a lot of ministers and doctors. Are there any front—or, people—well, front-line workers as well as people who are experiencing poverty, because really those are the experts in what they're living? You know, I would encourage the government to ensure that those voices are heard because those are the ones that are often absent and we make decisions for people and we need to include the people whose very lives these—this is going to impact.

Mrs. Stefanson: I want to thank the member for that, and I think that that's certainly important. There is—Ms. Zully Trujillo, I believe, is from northern Manitoba as well, and she is a layperson on the committee as well. She's had significant input into this.

I think it's important to go beyond this, just the people who are on the committee, but also talk a little bit about the consultation process that took place where believe we got—we reached out to more than 2,000 Manitoban groups, organizations, individuals, many of whom are declared as people who have lived in poverty at one point in their lives. And so I think it's important to recognize that those individuals have been an integral part of the formation of the strategy moving forward.

And so I just want to thank, you know, all those Manitobans who did participate. And, certainly, you know, I'm happy to go through a litany of those who were a part of it. I'm not sure if that's the way the member wants me to spend the time during committee, but certainly I can say that there were many, many people with lived experience at some point in their lives that were integral in this process of developing the strategy.

Mrs. Smith: So—sorry, I just see here now that the committee's names are actually in the book. It says there's one vacant community member position. Has that position been filled?

Mrs. Stefanson: No, it has not been filled to date.

Mrs. Smith: Has the committee thought about using some of the Make Poverty History data and all of the work that they did in the 24 hours that they went out and surveyed?

* (13:30)

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, and I want to thank all those involved in Make Poverty History. I think they do incredible work in our province, and, certainly, they were one of the groups—or the organizations that was consulted and submitted significant data research that they had done with respect to the development of the strategy moving forward. So, certainly, we welcome any more input that they have from their perspective and, indeed, from any Manitoban.

Mrs. Smith: So I want to go back to the poverty reduction strategy. We noticed that community belonging has been taken out.

Does the minister believe a sense of community belonging is a true measure of social inclusion and as a result of the proper—and a result—as a result of a proper indicator of the presence of poverty?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, it's—I think it's outlined in indicator No. 4 that they're still very much a part of this, so I'm not sure if—yes, I mean, certainly they are still a part of it, so I'm not sure where it indicates that, you know—yes.

Mrs. Smith: So—sorry. My colleague just pointed it out. So does the minister believe that that's a true indicator of—like, community belonging is a true indicator of how we reduce poverty, so making people a part of—and I think of North Point Douglas and the work that they've done, you know, in terms of, if you're living in poverty, you know, everyone kind of wraps themselves around to make sure that this person feels that they belong, that just because they're poor doesn't mean that, you know, there's no place for them.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I thank the member for that, and certainly what we heard loud and clear in some of the themes that came out of the consultation process was, firstly, that they felt that there were too many indicators in there and that there could be sort of a way of realigning some of those. And so that's what we looked at and, again, hearing back from those with lived experience, those others who—of the 2,000-plus that contributed to this process.

We also heard loud and clear that—in some cases, that there was sort of a disconnect between the indicators and the poverty reduction, so we want to make sure that—and that's why we will be looking at

establishing a target as well, moving forward, because we heard that loud and clear from Manitobans.

And the third thing that we heard loud and clear was that they wanted some alignment with the federal government's poverty reduction strategy. So, moving forward, those are some of the things that we will be working with Manitobans on.

Mrs. Smith: Miigwech for that. I want to move on to housing because we know, you know, right now, there's not enough social and affordable housing, so what's happening is people are having to take out of their, you know, budgets to put food on their table or to keep their lights on or to keep their water flowing.

Can the minister indicate how many actual total units of social and affordable housing are supported by the Manitoba Housing renewal corporation today as well as for this fiscal year?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes. I think we can—so—I believe, according to this, it would be 35,195.

Mrs. Smith: Would the minister be willing to table that so I could have a copy?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes. I think that we can certainly indicate and—as to where that might be available for the member, and we can certainly get that information to her.

Mrs. Smith: Thank you. I appreciate that. Can the minister also indicate, what is the definition of supported when it's under Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation?

Mrs. Stefanson: So the MHRC uses social and affordable housing as the definition.

Mrs. Smith: Does the minister know how many federal and provincial agreements are coming up under CMHC in terms of senior housing?

Mrs. Stefanson: There's currently a—yes, federal housing strategy that was put forward, We're in the process right now of—we will be shortly negotiated on a bilateral agreement with the federal government with respect to those very issues. So those are—that's certainly one of the issues that will come forward.

Mrs. Smith: So I just want to clarify. So some of those federal dollars from the bilateral agreements will be used to subsidize and keep current rents as is for seniors whose mortgages are coming up within those senior complexes?

Mrs. Stefanson: The specifics of the bilateral agreement haven't yet been negotiated, but those are

the types of things that we will be having discussions with them on to see what falls in certain criteria between the two.

Mrs. Smith: Can the minister tell us how many new and affordable social housing have been built since 2016?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think it's over 700.

Yes, it's close to, you know, about 750. Maybe a little bit more than that.

Mrs. Smith: Can the minister tell us how many new builds have been initiated since taking government?

Mrs. Stefanson: So we have completed 558, we have construction under way on 182 and construction pending at 351.

Mrs. Smith: Can the minister tell us when those 558 units started construction?

Mrs. Stefanson: All I can say to the member opposite is that the 558 were completed—where construction has been completed. I don't know when they started.

Mrs. Smith: Can the minister tell us when they were completed? Which month? What year?

Mrs. Stefanson: They were completed between March 2016 and November 2018.

* (13:40)

Mrs. Smith: Sorry, can the minister say that again?

Mrs. Stefanson: They were completed between March 2016 and November 2018.

Mrs. Smith: Can the minister go through each project and tell me exactly when the project started and when it was completed, please?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I don't have that information, that kind of detail, before me today.

Mrs. Smith: Is that something the minister can provide to me at a later date?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, we can get that information.

Mrs. Smith: Sorry, can I get a timeline on that?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I guess we're just going through some upgrades right now to technology at MHRC in terms of the database and so on, so that may take a little bit of time. But I will endeavour to get it—get the information to the member in a—you know, as soon as we can.

Mrs. Smith: Can the member—or the minister tell us, what is construction pending?

Mrs. Stefanson: Those would be projects that have been agreed upon and budgeted for and are, you know, currently going through the process of being built.

Mrs. Smith: Is there a timeline on when these constructions will be built? Is there shovels in the ground, or is there just money that's been allocated and is sitting there waiting to be built?

An Honourable Member: Could we get a list of those.

Mrs. Smith: Yes, if we could get a list of those as well.

Mrs. Stefanson: I can't give the specific details, as some of those—it's—the details are sort of pending on some of those projects, but I can tell the member that there are 351 of those.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Lamont has a question, but I'm not sure if you're sort of finished in your line here, if I should allow Mr. Lamont in.

Mrs. Smith: No, I'm still—line.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay.

Mrs. Smith: Okay. So is it fair to say that these are projects that are not under construction then, that—because it's—you said 351 are construction pending. So, to me, construction pending is that construction has begun, and it's waiting to be finished.

So, if construction hasn't started, then is it just projects that have been agreed upon and are waiting to get started?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I think it's important to indicate that there's various stages that take place: design and so on in all of this, engineering, architectural components to a lot of these things. And so it's not just a shovel-in-the-ground kind of thing. It's a—there's requests for proposals sent out in all of these stages. And so there's many, many different stages and components to building our affordable housing.

Mrs. Smith: So I guess what I'm trying to get at is are these projects that have been approved by the Treasury or—Treasury Board? So that money's sitting there, waiting to get built, or it hasn't even gone through the Treasury Board yet; these are just things that you're—you know, 351 units that you're hoping to build?

Mrs. Stefanson: These are at various stages of the approval process. So each stage has to go through the approval and so on, from Treasury Board as well. And so there's various stages that need to go through.

That's the process that we put in place as a result of the previous government that often did not put out requests for proposals and were not very transparent and accountable in the system.

Mrs. Smith: So I just heard the minister say that there's 351 projects that have been agreed upon, but yet they have not gone through Treasury Board. So how can you agree upon something when the funds have not been, you know, approved to be able to do these projects?

Mrs. Stefanson: No, what I said is that there's various stages with respect to the construction of projects. In Manitoba, those various stages go through various requests for proposals out there for engineering contracts, you know, architecture work that needs to be done.

So each step of the way, in many of those areas, depending on the size of it, needs to be approved.

Mrs. Smith: So 351 projects are pending construction.

Again, I want to go back. Are any of those units in construction? Have they been approved? I know you say they're at various stages. So perhaps the minister can provide that list, where those projects are at in the various stages.

Mrs. Stefanson: I don't have all the details of that right now. I mean, they're going through the various approval processes which include, as I've already indicated, through various RFP approvals through the—in that process, again, through engineering, through architecture, through who actually does the construction work on them. These are all subject to those—you know, each step of the way, moving forward, to ensure that we're finding the best value for money for Manitobans.

Mrs. Smith: So I'd ask the minister again—I mean, just to clarify, it would be easier for us to be able to visualize that and to see, actually, where the 351 projects are in construction and what stage they're at, if we could be provided that list. And I'm sure, you know, the minister's staff that are here today probably have access to that and could easily make us a copy so that we could just, you know, get past this question and move on to some more—some other, you know, questions that are around safe and affordable housing.

I mean, this is—we're talking about lifting people out of poverty. This is a big proponent of poverty, is people not being able to access affordable housing. And if we have 351 projects here that are in various construction-pending modes, that we don't know if

they've been approved by the Treasury Board, we don't know if—you know, you talk about getting architectural designs, well, I would think, you know, to be able to pay to do some of those things, you would have to have approval.

So, again, would the minister provide that list and just go through it with us so that we can clarify and, you know, get rid of some of these misconceptions that we may have?

Mrs. Stefanson: Just to clarify, it's not 351 projects, it's 351 units. So I just want to clarify that.

And, if the member is concerned about where these projects will be, I can tell her that they will be in many different communities all across Manitoba. And we are trying to ensure that all communities—whether northern Manitoba, rural Manitoba, Winnipeg—have their fair share in moving forward. And we are making sure that we have a diverse number of where these units will be situated, and we will make those announcements in a timely fashion.

* (13:50)

Mrs. Smith: So the minister speaks as if she knows exactly what's going on here. I don't know why she's withholding the information. Like, if you know that—where they're going to be, you know, what stages they're in, I don't know why you can't give us that information. I mean, we're asking a simple question and you gave us, you know, some answers, but very vague answers about 350 units—51 units that are in pending construction. All we're asking is for you to clarify that. What does that mean? Where are they at, and what stage are they at in terms of being built and if they've passed the, you know, through the Treasury Board already.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I have indicated that they're in various stages. I don't have that information in front of me right now, but that is—they're—they are pending and, certainly, as I have indicated already, that there will be—you know, of the 351, they will be situated in a very diverse way across our province, including northern and southwestern Manitoba and Winnipeg, and I've already answered those questions for the member opposite.

Mrs. Smith: So 351 units, I mean, that's about seven units per constituency; that's not a whole lot of units when we look at what the poverty rates are here in Manitoba and what our job as legislators is to do, is to help, you know, get people out of poverty. Does the minister think that 351 new units in Manitoba is enough units to, you know, help lower this number that

we're looking at in terms of getting children, families, you know, people we're elected to help, out of poverty?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think the member opposite brings up a very important point, in fact, when it comes to ensuring affordable housing and affordable rent for Manitobans. We've been able to help more than 3,000 more people on Rent Assist in the province, and I think that that offers that affordability for Manitobans, and we will continue to work with Manitobans to ensure that the money flows to them in the way of Rent Assist. We believe that that's the way it should happen, so the money can go regardless of where someone lives, that they able—that they're able to access that funding through the Rent Assist program.

And so, you know, we've always said it shouldn't be up to government to be building buildings entirely when it comes to this. We need to also partner with the private sector, with the not-for-profits as well. I know we do have a pilot project under way with Habitat for Humanity right now, and we're working with the non-for-profits to ensure that we do create more affordable housing for more Manitobans. And so we don't believe it should all be left up to government solely to do that; we need to create and utilize our partnerships in the private sector and in the non-for-profit sector as well as looking at things like Rent Assist to ensure affordability for Manitobans when they need it.

Mrs. Smith: So I asked the minister a straight question: Did she think 351 units was enough for your government to be building? You've been in government now for three years.

You know, as we've gone through this list, we've heard that these projects, the 750 new housing units that were built, were built by the previous government. You know, you just happened to get into government when they were completed.

Again, you know, Rent Assist was cut for a lot of Manitobans as well, some of them by as high as \$16. Sixteen dollars for a family is perhaps, you know, a day of food. And I know, you know, from experience that if I give a family \$15, they're going to maximize that \$15, and they're going to make sure that they feed their kids for a day.

So, when we're looking at, you know, the private sector and asking for dollars, you know, to help build housing that's affordable housing, you know, our government made a commitment to Manitobans to provide safe and affordable housing and for housing to be there for families that needed it. And right now,

you know, there's people on a wait-list; there's units just sitting, waiting for a paint job, that aren't getting painted. And then we have 350 units that are pending, and we don't know what stage they're at, if, you know, there's even a shovel in the ground; maybe it's just on paper, and, you know, things haven't even started yet.

So I'll ask the minister again: Does she think 351 units is enough units to support Manitobans that need housing today?

Mrs. Stefanson: First of all, all of the 750-odd units that we have had funding from our budget since we took over two and a half years ago, so they—the funding has flowed from some of those budgets. Some of them started, you know, earlier on; but certainly, moving forward, we have funded in one way, shape or form those 750 units.

But, you know, the member opposite talks about government being the only entity that can create affordable housing for Manitobans. We disagree fundamentally with that. We believe there should be affordable housing for Manitobans there when they need it. We had a significant deferred maintenance cost with Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation—more than a billion dollars, I believe. And certainly, you know, that was—that's significant for a government to be faced with. And we have a lot of work left ahead of us as a result of the mismanagement by the previous NDP government.

But, certainly, moving forward we recognize that government is not the sole entity to create affordable housing for Manitobans. We believe in partnerships with the federal government. That's why we will be entering into a bilateral agreement with them coming forward in the next short while to ensure more affordable housing on that front. So partnerships with the federal government, partnerships with the private sector, to ensure that affordable housing is built on that side, and partnerships as well with our not-for-profits. We also will work with municipalities in all of that, as well.

So, where the member opposite may believe that, you know, government is the sole entity to provide affordable housing for Manitobans, we disagree with that, and we think it's imperative that we work with our partners across the province and the other levels of government to ensure that there is affordable access to housing for those who need it.

Mrs. Smith: I absolutely didn't say that the government is the sole person that should—or the sole entity that should provide safe and affordable housing,

because we absolutely know that there's people out there that are providing decreased rents for people that need it, absolutely.

But cutting maintenance budgets is not going to help bring those units that you said the former government left in disarray back up to where they're—should be. Obviously, if you're cutting this maintenance budget, there isn't, you know, you're saying a need. Because, you know, it's money before people, and people need housing, and housing needs to be in safe conditions for people to live in it. And, if we're cutting maintenance budgets, it actually worked to get those units up to what they need to be so that people can live in them, you know.

Why was the maintenance budget cut in half—or, by 62 per cent?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, in fact, I quite, you know, agree with the member opposite with respect to the maintenance of affordable housing and—but the problem is when you're left with a billion dollars of deferred maintenance. Now, those were decisions on cuts, you know, that were made back in the previous NDP government, and left it for future governments to pay. I mean, it's not a good situation to be in as a result of the previous government's mismanagement of maintenance.

By deferring those charges, there's a greater cost down the road. And that's what the previous NDP did, so we're brought in and we're trying to clean up the mess of the previous NDP government to ensure that there is affordable housing for—there for Manitobans when they need it.

Mrs. Smith: But it doesn't make sense to cut the maintenance budget if there is deferred maintenance by \$1 million. You cut it by 62 per cent, which means you've just—you are basically just leaving the housing the way it is, which means nobody's living in those housing units.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes. I didn't really hear a question there, but, again, I'll talk to—I'll talk, you know, the member opposite needs to understand not \$1 million in deferred maintenance; it was \$1 billion, which is a huge amount of money for Manitobans.

* (14:00)

We've had to make some very difficult decisions as a new government as a result of the mess, you know, left from the previous NDP government. And so, you know, that's what we're doing. But we are also making decisions that are helping Manitobans significantly.

And, you know, if we look at the basic personal exemption increase by—it's \$2,020 by 2020. And certainly, that—we know that that will take more than 11,000 people off of taking—off of paying taxes to the provincial government in Manitoba. That is significant for those people who really need it.

So we believe in putting more money in the pockets of Manitobans for Manitobans to decide how they want to spend it. We also have a Rent Assist program that is very helpful. We've been able to help more than 3,000 more Manitobans since we came into government, and we believe that those are significant.

The member opposite may not think it is, and members opposite may not think it is, but I think to Manitobans out there, they realize—and they know who they are—that 11,000 Manitobans is a significant number when it comes to those are paying taxes versus those who won't pay taxes.

Mrs. Smith: So, speaking of paying, can the minister tell us how many units of social and affordable housing have been sold to the private sector since taking government in 2016?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, as—also along with the deferred maintenance charges of \$1 billion that we inherited from the previous NDP government, we had many housing units that were left vacant, you know, in deplorable conditions, that we inherited from the previous government, many in rural and northern communities, communities that need it the most. And so that's certainly what we were faced with.

And, again, we will look at partnerships in private sector, from the not-for-profit sector, from other levels of government, from communities, to ensure that we have the affordable housing there for those that need it when they want it.

But it certainly did not help by having the previous government leave Manitobans with a deferred maintenance charge of over \$1 billion. And that really hurt some of those communities very significantly.

Mrs. Smith: So the question was, how many units has the government sold of social affordable housing since taking government?

You know the minister said, basically, that they sold off units in communities that really needed it, but because they didn't want to fix them that, you know, they possibly sold them. So tell me differently, then.

Mrs. Stefanson: What we're left is with—what we have been left with by the previous government is many units and housing units that were left in deplorable

conditions in some areas of the province. And so we're looking at ways to partner with the private sector, with not-for-profits, to ensure that those communities are appropriately—that there is affordable housing in those areas for Manitobans when they need it.

Mrs. Smith: So 750 units were built under our government. We want to know how many this government has sold off, and where were they sold off from? What areas? What constituencies?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, I'm going to go back to—many of these units are—really, some of them are of no value because they've been left in deplorable conditions in some of these communities. So we're trying to work in partnership with other organizations, with—sorry—the private sector, for—not-for-profit sector. We're working with, you know, the Metis, other, you know, municipalities, the federal government, to ensure that we find a way, moving forward, to ensure that we have the access to housing in those communities when they need it.

Mrs. Smith: So the question was, what units were sold off, and what—where were they sold off from? So, if the minister can tell us that—I'm sure she has a list of that because she keeps referencing that they were in deplorable conditions, that they, you know, are partnering with people, so obviously that information is readily available.

So, if you could provide us with that, that would be great.

Mrs. Stefanson: No, what I said is that, yes, the previous government left Manitobans with many of these housing units and complexes in various areas in the province. That has been a huge challenge for us to make up for that billion dollars of deferred maintenance off-loading onto our government—but not really just us; it's Manitobans. It's the taxpayers of Manitoba.

We recognize that that is not sustainable moving forward, that we need to partner with the private sector—not-for-profit sector, with the federal government. And that will all be a part of the strategy that we will negotiate in a bilateral agreement, as well, with the federal government on ensuring affordable housing for Manitobans.

Mrs. Smith: So, currently, there's 35,000 social housing units. When you took government, how many housing units were there?

Mrs. Stefanson: Certainly, again, I will reiterate the fact that one of the challenges we've been faced with is

this deferred maintenance charge. And we've had to work with the private sector, with the not-for-profit to ensure that we provide more affordable housing. Not just necessarily, you know, owned and operated by Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation but to make sure that those housing units are there for Manitobans when they need it.

And so that's why we're looking at increasing, you know, those—the affordable housing for Manitobans across the board. And we will continue to work with partners to make sure that those—that there—that we have the affordable housing there for Manitobans when they need it.

Mrs. Smith: So I didn't hear the minister tell us how many housing units were there when she took—when their government took government.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, I'm going to say to the member opposite that I think what Manitobans want more is to ensure that the population that we have now is appropriately—that there's appropriate affordable housing for those in Manitoba. And I will—we will continue to work with our partners in the federal government to ensure that that is there for them.

And, certainly, by increasing, you know, the number of people that have been able to access Rent Assist by more than 3,000 since we came to office, I think, is a very significant thing. And there's more to, you know, affordability for Manitobans than just this.

And I have mentioned the basic personal exemption. We have indexed the minimum wage as well. And we will look at providing other opportunities for Manitobans when it comes to providing affordability for Manitobans.

Mrs. Smith: So Manitobans need housing today. I mean, obviously, there was more than 35,000 units, and this government—I don't know why they don't want to tell us how many that they've sold off.

I mean, it's a straight question. Manitobans deserve to know. The minister, you know, said that these housing belong to Manitobans, that this is their money. So they deserve to know.

So will the minister—again, I'll give her a chance to tell us how many social and affording—affordable housing units have been sold off since taking government and where were they located?

Mrs. Stefanson: No, I think, Mr. Chair, that—I think it's important that when we talk about having adequate and affordable housing for Manitobans that, again, it's

not just about the number of units that is with the, you know, Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation, that, indeed, there are other units out there that are provided, you know, helped by—through Rent Assist for Manitobans. And, again, I'll indicate that over 3,000 more Manitobans have been able to access that through Rent Assist.

* (14:10)

So it shouldn't just be about building buildings within the Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation. Again, you know, what happened because of that deferred maintenance cost that was offloaded onto our government, you know, that has a significant cost to it too, and it doesn't happen just the day that they leave office. It continues after that.

So we will continue to clean up the mess and ensure that we provide affordable housing for Manitobans, and we will do so through various programs, Rent Assist and others, to ensure that Manitobans—Manitobans have the money that they need in their pockets to ensure that they can afford the housing that they need.

Mrs. Smith: So I don't think the minister understands, but part of helping people to escape poverty is actually providing safe and affordable housing. And if our government is selling off these units, they've cut the maintenance, so they're not even fixing the units, and they're not building any units, how is that helping to lift people out of poverty? Like, is housing not part of her poverty strategy?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, we agree with the member opposite that providing safe and affordable housing to Manitobans is very important, and that's why we are continuing, not just looking at, you know, what Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation is doing and building—you know, and government building their own—being the only entity building affordable housing for Manitobans.

We need to partner with other entities like the private sector, not-for-profit. There's many groups, organizations, out there that are interested in providing affordable housing for Manitobans, and we'll continue to work in partnership with those entities, including the federal government. And I think it's going to be—and certainly on some of the maintenance, that will be one of the things that we'll discuss in terms of—you know, with the federal government, to see if that fits into their housing strategy and how we can partner, and that will be part of the negotiations that will take place with the bilat.

And so we're interested in having those discussions; we're interested in continuing along the path of providing affordable housing for Manitobans through programs like Rent Assist and EIA and other programs that are there to provide affordability for Manitobans for when they need it.

So we'll continue to work with our partners where, in the past, those partners were not sought out as a result of maybe ideological reasons—I don't know—but certainly we recognize that government shouldn't be the only entity in providing affordable housing for Manitobans, that we need all—ell of us together at the table to ensure that we have that affordable housing together for those Manitobans who need it.

Mrs. Smith: So can the minister tell us how many units of social and affordable housing has been transferred to municipalities since 2016?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, I don't—you know, I don't know that—what the relevance is in terms of transferring to municipalities. I know municipalities are very interested in being partners with us at the table when it comes to providing affordable housing for Manitobans to the extent that they can help and be a part of the strategy and the solution towards that end.

I know that many of our colleagues and I know members opposite were at AMM recently, and we heard about how, you know, local governments want fair say in various things and especially when it comes to something as importable—as important as housing and affordable housing for people in the local communities.

So we will continue to work with municipalities to that end, and we welcome the fact that they want to be part of the solution.

Mrs. Smith: So how many social and affordable housing has been transferred to municipalities since taking government?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I'll go back; I don't know the relevance of that. I know that, certainly, we have, you know, many partners with respect to providing affordable housing for Manitobans. Municipalities, again, are one of those partners at the table, and we'll continue to work with the municipalities to that end.

An Honourable Member: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. Stefanson: We did hear that at AMM and—

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Allum, on a point of order.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): The minister's, apparently, utterly unprepared and ill-equipped to answer questions from the critic from the opposition. I know you're going to characterize this as a dispute over the facts; the difficulty is she's not providing any facts, she's not providing any information. She's not capable of providing the—

An Honourable Member: The \$1-billion deferred maintenance isn't a fact that Manitobans are—

Mr. Chairperson: Order. Order.

Mr. Allum: If she's prepared to speak to the point of order after I'm done, but I'm just cautioning you that when you rule that this is a dispute over the facts, do keep in mind she has not provided any facts, and the one that she just spoke out of—out of turn, I might add—it's so utterly ridiculous that it's—it doesn't even make any sense.

So, Mr. Chair, could you ask the minister to actually provide answers to the questions being asked by the critic?

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Cullen, to the point of order?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Yes, to the point of order.

Interesting concept the member opposite raising. And quite to the contrary, I think the minister's been quite straightforward with her answers there.

I certainly would expect to hear a ruling on this. I think, you know, the minister has made it quite clear that it would seem the NDP are on a one-trick pony here in terms of housing owned by government. And the minister's been quite clear in terms of direction going forward. And clearly there's a different model here that we're dealing with.

And I know the members don't always want to accept the facts, the facts that we were left with a \$1-billion deficit in terms of housing. I mean—and clearly the minister has made comments about other alternatives. How many more people have been brought into the system and are being assisted with various other programs? I mean, that's the fact of the matter, that for some reason opposition members can't get their heads around.

I mean, it seems like a simple concept, but the opposition is stuck on a one-trick—government has to own every piece of property.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Swan, on the same point of order.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Yes, maybe just to take it a step down for everybody.

I mean, this is a committee meeting that's being convened to talk about Manitoba's Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy. The first indicator is described as: total units of social and affordable housing supported by the Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation. The question that I've heard, asked a number of times, is: You say there's this many units now. How many units were there in April 2016? That's what the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) has been asking. She's been asking because it is the very first indicator contained in the report that this committee is dealing with. And the minister has refused to answer the question numerous times. So I believe, in fact, there is a point of order, as raised by my colleague from Fort Garry-Riverview.

I appreciate the government may have a different philosophy. I appreciate they may have a different way they would like to count this. The fact of the matter is this is the specific question being asked about a specific indicator contained in this report, and on behalf of the people of Manitoba, we're entitled to get those answers from this minister. If she doesn't know the answer today, then she can take it as notice and can then provide that undertaking to the member. But we're here to do our job, which is dealing with this annual report and, unfortunately, we seem to be bogged down and unable to even get past indicator No. 1.

Mr. Chairperson: On this point of order, it's not a point of order. It is a dispute of the facts, and my ruling is that it is not a point of order.

We will continue on with questioning.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Saint—sorry, Point Douglas. Mrs. Smith, from Point Douglas.

Mrs. Smith: So I'll move on. I mean, hopefully, the minister has a change of heart and she does send us those facts because Manitobans do deserve to know how many social and affordable housing there are. And that is a part of the poverty reduction strategy, is helping Manitobans to get out of—to find safe, affordable housing and to ensure that, you know, our government is building houses every day—or, every year.

So I'll move on to children in care. So can the minister tell us how many kids in—children there are in care today?

*(14:20)

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, the member opposite will know, having worked in this field before that—how this works, that the numbers fluctuate on a daily basis. And, certainly, I, you know, don't know how many kids are in care as of this moment, certainly.

But I do know that the number of kids in care between 2016-17 and '17-18 declined by 3.6 per cent from 10,714 to 10,328.

Mrs. Smith: How were those numbers tabulated? What systems were used?

Mrs. Stefanson: They were tabulated through the CFSIS system.

Mrs. Smith: Just to be clear, that was the only system that was used to tabulate how many numbers of kids are in care?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I think what we've tried to do is provide more transparency and accountability in the system to ensure that we move everything more towards being under one system. That certainly was a recommendation that was made out of the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry and we're moving in that direction.

And so we have been moving in that direction for some time now and, as I understand, that that we're trying to work with the authorities, work with the agencies to ensure that we have an accurate count of children in care. And so we will work with the agencies and authorities to that end, to ensure that those numbers are accurate.

So we are going through a bit of a transition phase right now to ensure that more and more are accurately accounted for on a system that ensures that there's accountability and transparency to the process.

Mrs. Smith: Has every authority signed on to CFSIS and is reporting through that system?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes.

Mrs. Smith: How many children were in the care of Manitoba government in 2018, the baseline year?

Mrs. Stefanson: Sorry, could the member indicate—just clarify which year she's looking at? *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Mrs. Smith, Point Douglas, you must wait until I recognize you.

Mrs. Smith: Two thousand eight, which was the baseline year.

Mrs. Stefanson: The baseline year in 2008, as of March 31st, there were 7,837 kids in care.

Mrs. Smith: How many children were in the care of the Manitoba government in the fiscal year 2016-17?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, these are a snapshot in time, but, for the purposes of the report, it was 10,714, which I indicated previously in my opening statement.

Mrs. Smith: Was the number of children in care of the Manitoba—or what was the number of children in care in the Manitoba—of the Manitoba government in the fiscal year of 2016-17, and how was it calculated?

Mrs. Stefanson: I just answered that question to the member. It was 10,714. [*interjection*]

Mr. Chairperson: Mrs. Smith, Point Douglas.

Mrs. Smith: Sorry. And how was that calculated?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, for the purposes of these numbers, I mean, it was—these are apples-to-apples numbers that were calculated from 2016-17 to 2017-18. And so it was the first time in many years that we saw a reduction in the number of kids in care.

Now, I certainly recognize that there's much more work to be done and, you know, we all recognize that. And that's why we're putting together—that's why we've gone through a reform, with respect to the 'legislaton'. We had the legislative reform committee that will—has come forward with some recommendations about how we can improve the number of kids in care.

We are committed, as a government, to in—to reduce the number of kids in care, through preventative measures, through family reunification, through other initiatives as well. And so, while we recognize that maybe one snapshot in time shows a reduction, I think it's important to recognize that, after many, many years of dramatic increases to the number of kids in care, we certainly are committed as a government to ensure that we reverse that trend of the previous government, and we look at ways to—through preventative initiatives and family reunification to reduce the number of kids in care. And we're committed to that.

Mrs. Smith: So I just want to, you know, clarify: the minister said 10,714 kids in care. And that changes from day to day. So, you know—and it's only reported through the CFSIS system. You know, can that number possibly be higher today?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, we're trying to be much more transparent and accountable than the way things have happened in the past. In the past, there were self-reporting of agencies and the authorities, and the authorities have agreed that they want to—that we all want to work collectively to ensure that, you know, we

have a system in place that improves that transparency and accountability to know and understand exactly how many kids are in care, to ensure that we can provide the adequate programming and so on for those kids in care.

So I think it's really important to understand that, you know, that we're working together with the authorities, with the agencies to ensure that there is more transparency and accountability brought into the system.

Mrs. Smith: I agree there needs to be more accounting. You know, and we need to make sure that we're, you know, creating a full picture and not, you know, excluding some children due to certain indicators—that we need to make sure that every single kid that is in care, whether they are in a family member's house and not being, you know, financially supplemented—that those kids also need to be counted because, you know, these are kids that we're responsible for as a government—and we need to ensure that every single one of them, you know, is protected and that they get the support that they need—and that we're checking on these kids, that we're not just saying: Oh, you know, they're living there, they're not getting any financial support. You know, they are still a ward of the government, but, you know, someone else is looking after them, so we don't have to account for them because we're not paying for them. That's not the way that we should be doing business as a government.

As we saw, and you alluded to, you know, kids need protection, and it's our responsibility.

So I just—I'm going to ask the minister, in 2008, the number of kids in care, can she speak about how those calculations were done?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I believe there was a baseline that was set back in 2008. And I've already indicated what those numbers are. And, certainly, the member opposite will know that it was the previous government, the NDP government, that was in place at the time when that indicator was set. And, certainly, we see that the number of kids in care increased pretty significantly, you know, over that period of time.

And I think, you know, the member opposite—the point here, I think, is that—I think she and I are on the same page with respect to the number of kids in care, that I think it's important—you know, rather than focusing on the numbers and up and down and all this sort of stuff, it's really important that we have better tracking of those kids that are in care. And that's what we're moving towards, is a more transparent and

accountable system to tracking those children so that we ensure they get the programming and so on that they need.

And that's what we're doing as a government.

Mrs. Smith: Absolutely, we need to ensure that we're tracking all kids and, you know, ensuring that they're protected and that they're getting the supports and services that they need.

So I'm going to ask the minister just to confirm: So previous children not on CFSIS were included in the count, and now children that are not in the CFSIS system are not being counted—if that's the only system being used?

*(14:30)

Mr. Vice-Chairperson in the Chair

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, we work very closely with the authorities and, as of March 31st, we give them the numbers that we have with respect to each authority as to how many of the kids are in care, and we give them several months after that to come back to us. If there are kids that have not been in the CFSIS system, then we give them the opportunity to add those kids into the system to ensure that they're appropriately counted for. And, at the end of the day, a point in time comes where we all agree between the authorities and the department what the numbers are at that time. So that's how the counting takes place.

Mrs. Smith: So, if, on that given day that they're being counted and they're not in the CFSIS system and they're AWOL or they're at a family members or—are those kids encaptured in that count?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes. It's for the previous, like, fiscal year. So March 31st, there comes a point in time where we get, you know, what the numbers are. And then, if there is some discrepancy in terms of the number of kids in care from the authority's standpoint, they do a review of it and they come back to us with a difference in the numbers.

Now, we do a calculation, sort of, back and forth. We have tried to help. We work with them. We've helped them in terms of—well, we worked with the authorities to help increase the transparency and accountability within the process, and they are given that couple of months to come back with the appropriate—if there is a discrepancy between the numbers. And we work with them to ensure that those children are accounted for.

Mrs. Smith: Does that include children who are staying with a family member that isn't receiving financial assistance for the child?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, as a matter of fact, you know, both are accounted for. There's non-paid care as well as those that are paid for as well. And what we've done is we've separated those out to ensure that we can then track those family reunifications, because many of those—the non-paid care is back in families. And so we want to ensure that we can track the number of reunifications that are taking place, so we think that that's a very important part of this as well.

Mrs. Smith: So, just to be clear, children or families who are receiving non-paid care are included in the count, the 10,714 children currently in care?

Mrs. Stefanson: No, we actually have separated them out now so that we've got—and, for each, you know, year, and I believe that this is the way it's done in the—but, anyway, it's—we've ensured that we have separated those two numbers out for the last number of years. So the 10,714 is the number of paid children in care.

Mrs. Smith: Would the minister provide the numbers of non-paid care—of how many children are currently in non-paid care?

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mrs. Stefanson: I misspoke, Mr. Chair. It is actually included in the 10,000—wait a minute—sorry for the confusion here, Mr. Chair, and these are actually indicated in the annual report. But I can certainly indicate that 2016-17, the number of children in care, 10,714—those were paid care; 638—non-paid care; and, in 2017-18—10,328 were paid care; and 448 were non-paid care.

So you can see that we are trying to bring some transparency accountability to the process to ensure that we are making, you know, the valid comparisons.

Mr. Swan: I just want to step up on that same issue. I understand that, in fact, there has been a change in this government's policy and now children who may be in care but who are not in a First Nation that's using the CFSIS system are no longer counted.

Is that correct?

Mrs. Stefanson: No, that is not correct.

Mr. Swan: Well, I understand from a number of First Nations that they've been advised that this government, I suppose under the guise of transparency or whatever words used, that that is exactly what this government is doing.

So is the minister, then, denying that the number 10,328—is she denying that that does not include children in care in Manitoba in a First Nation which does not use the CFSIS system?

Mrs. Stefanson: This includes both the First Nations on and off of reserve—First Nation kids in care in both categories.

Mr. Swan: Just—I was just listening to the minister earlier on saying that there's a snapshot that's taken, which, I agree, is reasonable because the number does fluctuate from day to day.

I just want to understand what process happens after March 31st. And what happens in what the minister has said might be a month or two, to come up with a different number?

Can the minister just walk me through that?

Mrs. Stefanson: So what happens is we send a final list of the kids in care by authority and—for their—on behalf of their agencies. And so they reconcile that between what they have in their system, and they come back to us with any, you know, any discrepancies. We—and those get added to the CFSIS system. And then we go—they come back to us again, we send back a list again for them to then look at the list again.

So we give them two opportunities to look at the list to ensure that all of the kids are accounted for on the CFSIS system.

Mr. Swan: So it's the minister's position that, even if a First Nation is not using the CFSIS system, if the department is then told of the name of a child that's not currently on the CFSIS system, that the department then adds that child to the CFSIS system within this time period?

* (14:40)

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I think where the confusion lies here is that many of these names of kids—all of the names of the kids under provincial care are on the CFSIS system, and usually those—I mean, those align. Where the discrepancy is is those that are in federal care. And so what we do is assure that—and we check with the federal government, we do—there's an accountability side of this to ensure that their lists are the same as the agencies'. And then we reconcile all of those names on CFSIS.

Mr. Swan: So can the minister, then, explain why the number of children in care reported by the various agencies in Manitoba are higher than the number that

the government is now reporting in this report on poverty reduction and social inclusion?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I mean, again, we—the authorities sort of—they have—they work on their own and they decide when they report the numbers, and we don't have any control over that in terms of the numbers that they use for their annual reports and so on. I think what it is is that we give them the opportunity, twice, to come back to us to ensure that we have an accurate and a—and transparent and accountable system, that all of those kids who are in care are accurately reported on the CFSIS system.

So, again, we just—we don't have any authority over the authorities to decide, you know, when—you know, what numbers they use. But, certainly, we have tracking, twice over, after that to ensure that—and, again, the authorities sign off on it; they send back to us and they say, you know, these are our numbers. So we're—again, we'll continue to work with the authorities on that.

Mr. Swan: Just so I'm clear, the minister's acknowledging the number of children in care in Manitoba is higher, or was higher, for 2017-18 than the number, 10,328, that the minister has put in the report and the minister has now relied upon in the House. That's what I'm hearing this minister saying: The actual number of children in care in Manitoba is higher than that number.

Mrs. Stefanson: The number of paid children in care, in Manitoba, is 10,328, and non-paid care is 448. This is reported in the annual report and so there is, you know—that's what I've been saying all the way along.

Mr. Swan: So, if the numbers that are reported by the various agencies are higher, then is the minister saying that these authorities are making up children? Or how can she explain that?

Mrs. Stefanson: Again, it's that's snapshot in time of what they may be using in terms of the number of kids in care and, you know, we do give them two opportunities to come back. We believe in working, you know, very closely with the authorities to ensure that we have an accurate number of kids in care that are reported. And we look forward to building on that relationship with the authorities. Again, they have the authority to, you know, to use whatever, you know, time frame they want in terms of the number of kids they believe they had in care at that time. And that's, you know, the way it's done.

Mr. Swan: Just so I understand this, and I appreciate the point that the number of children in care will go up

and down, from day to day—just like many other areas in government. But my understanding is this reconciliation process the minister's talking about is to make sure that we do have one snapshot, as of the same date.

My point is this: The minister has reported on the number of children in care, as of a certain date, which I understand is March 31st. My understanding is that's also the date that the various agencies have used as the number of children in care. And what I'm asking the minister to do is to explain why, even after all these steps are taken, why there is a discrepancy between how many children in care the agencies say there are in Manitoba and how many children in care this minister says are in care in Manitoba.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, there isn't a discrepancy between the two numbers. We rely on the authorities who work with the agencies within their purview to ensure that, you know—and twice over, to ensure that we reflect the number of kids in care. So that is what is reflected in the numbers in the annual report.

Mrs. Smith: So I've met with several of these agencies, and they're concerned that these numbers aren't accurate, that, you know, when they're asked to account, they're not in CFSIS system. They're being forced to go onto a system, you know, that when you're, you know, counting kids from day to day, it changes.

And they—this March 31st date, it's kind of like the education system. So, if a kid isn't in their seat on that day, then they're not accounted. And agencies are—have been saying the same thing: if a kid isn't in their bed or they're not being—or they're at family member's, that they're not being accounted for.

So—and I said this earlier, like, these kids are in the care of our province. And it's super important—and I know you used the term snapshot, but our kids aren't snapshots. Our kids are something that should have a constant eye on, that we can't just simply take a picture on one day and, you know, account for them.

But, you know, are you hearing agencies' concerns about all of the numbers reflecting the actual kids that are in care? And that if they're not in their bed, or they're at a family member's, that they are still considered to be a kid in care and that it is still the responsibility of the government to ensure that they are protected and that their numbers are accurately reflected, so that we're not—and, I mean, you know, I know the minister cares about kids. She has kids of her own, you know, and I know that, you know, we're all

here because we don't want to see any kids in care. You know, we want to ensure that kids are with their families, that they're getting the supports that they need, and that we're doing everything as a government to ensure that families are kept together.

But we also have to accurately reflect these numbers and not try to hide behind numbers, because numbers don't mean—like, whether it's 11,000–12,000–1,000, it doesn't matter. One kid in care is too many, and we need to ensure that every kid—you know, and, of course, we're going to get criticism about how many kids in care, but that's our job as legislators, is to take that criticism, you know.

But we have to change that into action to ensure that, you know, we're getting these kids back into their families, that they're not, you know, in homes where they're, you know, being abused or they're leaving worse off than what they came in.

So my question to the minister is: Is she listening to the First Nations agencies in how the accounting process is going and what they're saying, in terms of, you know, how they're accounting for kids and the support they need?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I want to thank the member for her comments. And, certainly, you know, I've always had a trouble with this snapshot-in-time, so to speak, and I don't like to use that, as well, as a term, and if there's a better term I could find it's—that March 31st was set, you know, many, many years ago in terms of, you know, that's the number of kids in care and this is the way we go.

And, certainly, you know, we want to bring more transparency and accountability from a reporting standpoint, and this is just on the reporting side, you know, but we work very closely with the agencies and authorities to that end. And, you know, we're always looking at ways that we can improve the transparency and accountability.

And, if the member opposite is hearing things, you know, please, you know, let my office know. We want to ensure that we do have a more transparent and accountable process for these kids. This is about the kids. But, again, I go back to—this is a reporting framework that was put in place many years ago. This is the way it's been done in terms of a snapshot in time on the 31st, March 31st of every year.

* (14:50)

And so, you know, that's just on the reporting side, but we certainly do care very deeply about all those

kids who are in care. We want to find ways to prevent kids from—more kids from getting into care. We want to reduce the number of kids in care. We want to increase the family reunifications. And we are working to that end. We are taking steps to do so.

But, again, as I started off saying today, you know, we don't have a monopoly on good ideas. And, certainly, the member opposite, I know she cares very deeply about this. And, if she has some further ideas about how she can help improve the transparency and accountability and the care for those kids, I'm open to that.

Mrs. Smith: I appreciate that, and I'd absolutely love to sit down and, you know, talk about some ideas that come from kids that are in care.

Can the minister talk about, you know, the—what she's doing to ensure that the agencies that are having to use the CFSIS system have the proper training to be able to access that and put the information in?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think that's an important component as we're moving towards transparency and accountability. We will—we, certainly, as a department work with the agencies and the authorities to ensure that they know the system and how it works. And we'll continue to work with them on that front. And, you know—but that's—we have been doing that.

Of course, there's still more work to be done, and we'll continue to work with the agencies and authorities to that end.

Mrs. Smith: So has the authorities received any training on the CFSIS system?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes. The authorities have their own trainers, but we also, as well as the department, send trainers out to agencies as well to help out in this process. And so that would be the process that takes place now. We do have those trainers.

Mrs. Smith: A 2016 briefing note regarding compliance with CFS—CFSIS indicated that some agencies of the northern authority had between 40 per cent and 85 per cent of information missing. That means nearly 90 per cent of kids in care are not in CFSIS.

Does the minister think anything has changed since 2016, since—in terms of compliance?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, actually, those kids—and, in particular, the northern authority—are—they're—they do have—their file is on CFSIS. What—the problem sometimes is that not—the—it's not necessarily the case

where all of the required information is entered into their files.

And so that's where—so, I mean, clearly, you know, we recognize there's more work to be done there to ensure the transparency and accountability—again, to ensure that all those kids in the northern authority are accounted for in the system.

Mrs. Smith: So, as someone, you know, who worked in the child-welfare system, I find that very problematic that, you know, we would continue to allow people who are in care of our children to, you know, not have all of the information that's required uploaded to, you know, the CFSIS system. That puts children in danger.

And I think, you know, you've put a compliance order in, but has that changed anything? You know, has, you know, these authorities—you know, are they complying more than they did before?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes. We, certainly, have made some improvements in the system, and that's ultimately what we're looking to do: is to improve transparency and accountability. And so that's why we have trainers that go out and work with the authorities and agencies to ensure that we can improve that.

Mr. Chairperson: Before we continue, it is getting close to 3 o'clock, so I was just going to ask, what is the will of the committee?

Mrs. Smith: Will of the committee to rise.

Mr. Chairperson: At 3 o'clock?

Mrs. Smith: Three o'clock.

Mr. Chairperson: Is that agreed upon, that the committee will rise at 3 o'clock?

An Honourable Member: Sure.

An Honourable Member: Agreed.

An Honourable Member: After a vote.

Mr. Chairperson: There will be a question put forward whether or not the report is accepted.

Mrs. Smith: Going back to the CFSIS system, does the agency or authority support the change in data source in how many children in care are counted? So I know that, you know, the minister said that there's more work to be done in terms of putting that information onto the CFSIS system.

I know when I worked in child care, you know, everything was kept in a file and not online, so did the agencies support everything going onto CFSIS?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes. All the authorities have signed off on this, that CFSIS would be the indicator of the number of kids in care as well as the criteria—just one moment—yes, sorry. So all four authorities have agreed to the method of the number of kids in care in terms of being reported on CFSIS as well as the indicators that will be reported on CFSIS as well.

Mrs. Smith: Does the minister think that relying only on one system, CFSIS, potentially puts children at risk?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think it's important that we recognize that, you know, we're working in conjunction with the authorities here and they've agreed to utilize the system and agreed to utilize the criteria, I guess, used or the various—sorry, the information that should be included within the file has been agreed to as well, and I think we'll continue to work with the authorities to ensure that we provide more accountability and transparency in the system.

We don't plan to do this alone. We will do this in conjunction with them and, to the extent that they have further ideas of how we can create better transparency and accountability within the system, we will continue to work with those, you know, with the authorities.

Mrs. Smith: Was there a review done this year of the amount of kids in care?

* (15:00)

Mrs. Stefanson: I'm not sure what the member is talking about in terms of—I mean, there was a review done on various legislative changes that was done. There was a committee that was struck to go out and consult with members of the public to engage on that discussion about how we can modernize the child and family services system, so pretty extensive consultations. I think it was more than 1,500 groups, organizations that were consulted with out there. And a very proactive of—group of volunteers on that committee. And, certainly, want to thank them for all of the work that we had—or that they did for us.

So the committee met more than—yes, over 1,500 Manitobans—and had formal meetings in Winnipeg and meetings with key stakeholders in Thompson, Dauphin and Brandon as well, so trying to, again, get that rural and northern perspective as well as

part of this. And I think it's a very important part of this.

Mrs. Smith: I know there was a CFS legislative committee that came together and they put together a report of recommendations. Will the minister tell us where the government is at in terms of legislating those recommendations?

Mrs. Stefanson: We're in the process of working with the authorities and the First Nation communities because, of course, this was put together as a recommendation to government, so we're now in the consultation process with respect to that, reaching out to various people and organizations within the community to ensure that, you know, to get their feedback as to what they feel about the recommendations in the report. And I think that that's a very important part of this, to engage—you know, certainly, it was the 1,500 Manitobans that we went out and engaged with, but we also need to have that consultation process beyond that is to see next steps and engage with the authorities and the First Nation communities on this.

Mr. Chairperson: As agreed by the committee, the hour being 3 p.m., if we're finished with questions—if not, if the committee—I mean, we had agreed to, I guess, adjourn at 3.

Then we will ask the question. Shall the Annual Report of the Manitoba Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy (All Aboard) for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2018 pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Some Honourable Members: No.

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

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

The hour being 3 p.m., what is the will of the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Rise.

Mr. Chairperson: Committee rise.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 3:02 p.m.

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