

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

Chairperson
Mr. Bidhu Jha
Constituency of Radisson

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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

Monday, December 14, 2015

TIME – 10:30 a.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson)

VICE-CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia)

ATTENDANCE – 11 QUORUM – 6

Members of the Committee present:

*Hon. Ms. Irvin-Ross, Hon. Mr. Kostyshyn,
 Hon. Ms. Marcelino, Hon. Mr. Saran*

*Messrs. Jha, Martin, Mrs. Mitchelson, Messrs.
 Pedersen, Swan, Wiebe, Wishart*

Substitutions:

Mr. Pedersen for Mrs. Driedger

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, 2014*

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

* * *

Clerk Assistant (Mr. Andrea Signorelli): Morning. The Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development, please come to order.

Before the committee can proceed with the business before it, it must elect a new Chairperson.

Are there any nominations for this position?

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I nominate Mr. Jha.

Clerk Assistant: Mr. Jha has been nominated. Are there any other nominations?

Hearing no other nominations, Mr. Jha, will you please take the Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Good morning. Our next item of business is the election of a Vice-Chairperson.

Are there any nominations for the position?

Mr. Swan: I nominate Mr. Wiebe.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Wiebe has been nominated. Are there any other nominations?

Seeing no other nominations, Mr. Wiebe is elected Vice-Chairperson.

This meeting has been called to consider the following: annual report of Manitoba poverty reduction and social inclusion strategy for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2014; annual report for Manitoba poverty reduction and social inclusion strategy for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

Before we get started, are there any suggestions from the committee as to how long the committee should be sitting this morning?

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): I think we'll sit to 11:30 and then look and see whether we've completed our task.

Mr. Chairperson: Is 11:30 okay? *[Agreed]*

Are there any suggestions as to the order in which the reports should be considered?

Mr. Wishart: Would like to consider a global approach to this.

Mr. Chairperson: The global approach, is that agreeable? *[Agreed]*

Committee Substitution

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please.

I'd like to inform the committee that, under the rule 85(2), the following membership substitution has been made for this committee effective immediately: Mr. Pedersen for Mrs. Driedger.

Thank you.

* * *

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

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): I am pleased to present to the committee the third ALL Aboard annual report. Publishing this report is one of the requirements set in The Poverty Reduction Strategy Act. As mandated by The Poverty Reduction Strategy Act, we have continued to advance our poverty reduction efforts through the ALL Aboard poverty reduction strategy, the ALL Aboard Committee and by prioritizing investments which will reduce poverty in our provincial budget papers.

Mr. Chair, we are proud to collaborate with community-based and antipoverty organizations in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. With their input, we have made significant investments in income support, such as Rent Assist, social and affordable housing, child care and training which are beginning to show positive results.

The 2014-15 annual report shows that there were 5,000 fewer Manitobans living—Manitobans, including 4,000 children, living below the Market Basket Measure poverty line in 2013 than in 2012. There has been an 8.8 per cent decrease in the percentage of Manitoba households living in core housing need since 2000, a drop of 3,505 households.

*(10:40)

Minimum wage increased by 26 per cent since 2008, more than twice the rate of inflation. More than 1,000 new child-care spaces were added in 2014-2015. This is an 11 per cent increase in the percentage of children who have access to child care. While we have seen a decline in employment rates between 2008 and 2014, recent 2015 statistics have strong growth.

There is still more work to do, but these indicators show that we are on the right track. The problem of poverty is deep and complex. There is still much to be done. We continue to consult with our stakeholders, most importantly with those who are directly affected by poverty, to sustain the gains that we have achieved in poverty alleviation and social inclusion.

Poverty reduction is critical to building prosperity and promoting diversity in our province. We are all invested in creating a truly accessible and equal Manitoba. With our economic and social investments, combined with the tenacity, experience and dedication of those working on the front lines

and the Manitobans experiencing poverty first-hand, we are moving closer to this future.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the honourable minister.

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

Mr. Wishart: I would like to compliment those that have put the report together. We may disagree on some of the conclusions within the report, but I think it is absolutely necessary that all Manitobans be included in the plan for the province as we move forward, and it is necessary to engage those that are on limited and fixed incomes as to what approach might be taken to improve their situation in the future. So I think in that regard it is a worthwhile document in that we actually have some discussion of what's going on, though we may disagree on some of the contents.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the member.

Now the floor is open for questions.

Mr. Wishart: I'd like to determine, I guess initially, how often the ALL Aboard Committee met during the year.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The committee met on three occasions in 2014: April, June and September. And we met four times in 2015: February, July, September and December.

Mr. Wishart: And I assume, then, that that's in line with the frequency guidelines. I believe four times a year was the target?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That's correct.

Mr. Wishart: Now, I'm not going to go into too great a depth with every section, but I did want to talk a little bit about the children in care number that you're using here, because numbers that you have—and I know we talked briefly with the Children's Advocate about the fluctuation in numbers, but the numbers in care that you're showing here differ quite substantially from the information that we're getting from FIPPAs.

And so I wondered if the minister wanted to comment, especially as the—we have two sets of FIPPAs that confirm the April number of children in care to be 10,852 from two different FIPPA requests. And I wondered if the minister would like to give us

some indication as to why she has a different number in this report, a much lower number.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That would be the difference of the voluntary placement agreements that would create the differences. There are voluntary placement agreements are agreements that parents are asking for Child and Family Services to take over the responsibility and provide support to them, and there are many, as I spoke in the earlier committee, there are many jurisdictions that count children in care much differently. There are some groups that do not account for kinship care, which in our system accounts for 35 per cent of the population that is in care, and also not including the voluntary placement agreements, nor the extension of care.

So, as we're moving forward—and there's many comparisons that are happening across jurisdictions—we are trying to work with our groups and develop more consistent numbers. There are a number of transformations that are happening in the child-welfare system, and many of them are focused at reducing the number of children in care. I had the privilege of co-chairing a committee with Premier McLeod from the Northwest Territories that the entire focus of that work was how do we reduce the number of Aboriginal children in care and continue to provide the necessary prevention services that families need, so we are going to be continuing to do that.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Chair, I just have a question for some clarification because I do recall spending several years as the minister of Family Services, and voluntary placements, when I was the minister, were very often negotiated with. There was a sense that children were in need of being apprehended, but if we could work with the family and get a voluntary placement rather than apprehend that child, there was a better opportunity to work with the family to maybe get that family back together. But voluntary placements were not—we asked families to voluntary-place their children rather than apprehend them. So I'm wondering if that definition has changed since my time in Family Services.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: No, it hasn't changed, and so that is one segment. VPAs are a tool. They're being used less and less in our system, as you'll notice with the changes in numbers and the changes in our legislation. But there also is—if families are struggling to care for their children for any reason, whether it's medical or behavioural, they do have that

option to reach out before there is a crisis in the family and ask for support, and sometimes that support comes into the realm of a child being placed in care.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So, then, the minister must have the numbers on how many families are coming to ask to have their children placed in Child and Family Services versus the more voluntary placements that are negotiated rather than apprehending the child. Do we have those numbers available to us?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We don't have them broken down like that. We know that there are approximately 700 children that are in care that are under the designation of voluntary placement agreement. I can't tell you on which ones was a negotiated, which one was a request by the family, but what's important to know with this category is that the parents are still engaged in the process, still maintain guardianship and still participate in all decisions around the care of their children.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I won't belabour this any longer, but I think it is very important for the minister to get her hands on that kind of information because the first comment that was put on the record gave us a false sense. We weren't really comparing apples and apples, and when you're looking at taking voluntary placements out of the number of children in care and saying that we can remove 700 off the list because parents voluntary-placed them there, threw their hands up and said I can't deal with this anymore, versus how many we've negotiated. So I think that's very important, because I don't think you can take children out of the equation and indicate that they're not children in care unless we know those answers.

Mr. Wishart: I assume the minister didn't want to respond to those comments, but I, too, want to ask a question or two around the voluntary placement numbers.

So, in your definition as you're working it these days, the total number of children in care would be the number that was listed here, 10,215, plus the 700 voluntary placements, and then there, of course, on top of that, would be the extensions of care. Is that correct?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The number that you cited—I think it was 10,215—that includes the voluntary placements.

Mr. Wishart: But it does not include the extensions of care.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That's correct.

Mr. Wishart: So, for the last year, what would the average number of extensions of care—I know the number has been increasing, so I'm wondering if you can give us some idea as to that.

* (11:50)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Chair, 697 youth are in extension of care—*[interjection]* Well, as of—

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Wishart. *[interjection]* Excuse me. Mr. Wishart, please address through the Chair.

Mr. Wishart: That's the average number?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That's the number: 697 youth are in extension of care as of March 31st, 2015.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you, Minister, as of March 31st is the number you're quoting.

In the area of food security, we find it tough to rationalize the progress being made. Certainly, I recognize that some of the projects in the North in terms of garden development and such have been very good, and it's very hard to get any real numbers around those, as the minister probably appreciates.

But, when we see increased number of children using food banks, total number of people using food banks going up and that the, of course, the percentage being very high that are children, we find those two things hard to relate to one another as progress, and yet food bank usage continuing to rise.

I wonder if the minister would care to comment on whether or not she feels food bank usage is a good indicator.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: What I'm going to comment on, you know, there's lots of indicators that are used—that are being used, lots of different measurements.

We know that the food bank movement, when you speak to them, they often talk about their job is to work themselves out of work, and we are using this information to help give us some insight in the work that we have to do. I think you have to look behind those numbers, and who are those families that are accessing the food bank? Are they people—they're people living in poverty, but the numbers, as we heard when they released the report, the number of seniors is increasing, but also who are the families? Are the families individuals who are working poor families? Are they families that are on

social assistance? Are there newcomer families? So we need to evaluate the information that we receive.

We need to ensure that as we move forward that we're providing food security initiatives, and I—highlighted the work that's happening in the North and the gardens that are being grown as well as the meat that people are producing. There's lots of pride in the chickens that are being grown in the community. We have a lot more work to do. I think with the food centre that we have in Gilbert Park, that's a really good example of a new way of doing business and providing food but also providing education to individuals.

We know that by making investments, not one indicator can stand alone, that all of these indicators need to be working together, and we strongly believe that the best way out of poverty is education and employment, and we've continued to make investments in our education system, our post-secondary system, and also ensuring that we're creating jobs.

But we can't stop there. You have to make sure that we're providing affordable housing and social housing for individuals across the province. Making sure that people have good access to child care is another example, and as you've highlighted, making sure that food security is at top of mind, and so we're going to continue to partner.

We have partnered with the food bank. They're part of our round-table conversations that we've had in the past around what do we need to do to improve it. They've identified the breakfast programs as a way to improve services. In the last budget we were able to expand that, and again in this Throne Speech that was tabled recently you heard more commitment about how we move forward.

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the minister's comments, but the section that she has on food security really doesn't have any measures that I can see, other than some specific examples, and, you know, it is nice to quote the examples that have been successful out there, and I hope we can find a lot more.

But I would think something like the use of food banks in the province, and, of course, Winnipeg Harvest has a much larger network than just the city of Winnipeg, I think it's actually a very good measure, and I certainly recognize that they would love to put themselves out of business. It would certainly be a great goal for all of us here in Manitoba.

Why aren't we using what is a quantitative measure, and in an area where, frankly, finding good quantitative measures is a bit of a challenge, why wouldn't we be using food bank usage as an indicator rather than something that appears to be more editorialism than measure?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Just—I wanted to put on the record some facts about food bank usage in Manitoba, and it is being reported that Manitoba children using food banks has been decreasing since 2012 and it's been a decrease of 11.5 per cent, so you're right; that is a significant indicator about what is happening. But, as we have developed our indicators, we spoke with our stakeholders. We talked to them about measurements and what measurement tools we should use, and this is what we agreed to.

We have made a commitment to go out publicly and start another round of conversations about timelines and targets and will certainly add this to that conversation as we move forward. I thank the member for having this conversation with me and I think that it's valuable. It's—I'm glad that we're spending this much time and discussing poverty and the importance of reducing it and the—how it impacts all of us and how there are so many indicators and the solutions are equally as complex. So we will consider this as we move forward with our next round of deliberations.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I certainly appreciate those comments, and I hope the minister actually makes an attempt in the next round of consultations, if she's going to put together some indicators, that they are actually measurable indicators. Too many in this report seem to be very much a matter of opinion or editorial, and I understand that you had a process that developed the first set of indicators, so I know—I recall from our long discussion the first time we did this that the ability to justify how those indicators had been selection was a little weak in some points. And I'm not going to go there again today, so you'll be greatly relieved in the timelines that we have left.

But I think it is important that measurable goals be put in place and a methodology be put in place that is clear to everyone. And the ones that are out there and used, you know, the Campaign 2000 numbers on child poverty, for instance, are something that I think we all can accept as at least some measure. Maybe they're not numbers that you particularly like but they are a measure. And, if you're making real progress, I think that any measure would, at some point, show that progress.

So I would certainly encourage the minister to begin using numbers like food bank numbers, child poverty numbers such as Campaign 2000 regularly put out. And, yes, if you want to break them down a little further, I'd be more than happy to have—see them broken down further so that we can actually find the target areas where we can focus in the future. So, if the minister comes up with a new set, let's hope that these measures would include real numbers.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Just for the member's information, I recall when Minister Mackintosh and I were in the process of having the conversations about targets and timelines, and every advocate you spoke to had their preferred measurement. And I'm not going to get into the debate about what measurement is right or comparable. I know that we have consistently used the mass—or basket—Market Basket measurement, MBM, too, over the years, so we can show you a consistent decline in what's happened.

It gets complicated for many Manitobans when we keep throwing out different measurements, so we were going to go into those consultations working towards one measurement, one consistent measurement. It will be up to the advocates, whether that they're prepared to do that. We anticipate it will be extremely lively conversation, and thank you very much for your suggestions and—thank you.

Mr. Wishart: Well, thank you very much and I'll go on to another section.

In particular, when we talk about disposable income—and this, I guess, relates a bit to the market measure, because it is one that doesn't include the tax burden in its measure. And I think it's important that after-tax dollars be a measure that is used in terms of poverty numbers, because, certainly, that's not disposable income if you have to pay tax on it.

* (11:00)

And so we would certainly want to see a better measure in regards to that. And we've been hearing from those that are on limited and fixed incomes that the PST increase or RST increase has been a burden to them, not only the increase but the broadening. And in particular, we hear from a lot of people that are on fixed income, pension people, very often who have insurance and things like that that they use to protect their risk, that the inclusion of that in particular—in fact, that is probably the most frequent complaint we have had on financial issues from the general public at our office—and I know I'm not alone

in that—is why has this been expanded to do that, and how do we deal with this particular burden because, of course, I'm sure the minister is aware at the same time the insurance industry has been finding their own reasons to increase the rates due to loss experience.

So I wonder if the minister would care to comment on using a before-and-after-tax measure of the impact on—of—on family incomes.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: As we've spoken about earlier, that—it's important that there is a consistent measure.

I have stated over every committee meeting that our preferred measurement is the MBM. We're going to continue to use that as the measurement. I think, as we go out and can meet with stakeholders and have the conversations about targets and timelines, which many advocates have been asking for for a number of years, that we will have that debate about where we want to go and how we want to—what measurement we want to use. So I look forward to those consultations, and thank you very much for your input.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that.

Graduation rates—and, of course, we're all very pleased that graduation rates continue to rise. I wonder, given the report that came back on graduation rates of those that were involved in CFS being markedly lower, if there has been any attempt to differentiate graduation rates in rural and northern areas from urban areas or from other particular interests in the province. Do you have any breakdown on graduation rates that you would like to share with that—share with us on regards to that?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I do not have the breakdown. What—the measurement that we are using for the ALL Aboard report is the overall graduation rates. I know that there is lots of conversation happening around what are the needs within—the needs—how do the needs differ in the rural and the North, as well as the specific issues of children in care. The rural and the North, I know that there has been a long-standing partnership with the Frontier School Division who have provided a good quality of education. I know, also, that the new Liberal government is taking an interest in indigenous education and will be working very closely with the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson) and the Premier of Manitoba (Mr. Selinger) in the implementation of an indigenous education strategy, which, we believe, will make a significant difference.

What's good is our graduation rates are increasing. That needs to be celebrated. That needs to—we need to congratulate the educators within the system and also the innovators who are finding new ways to engage young people and provide them with multiple opportunities. I think you've probably heard about some of the trades programs that we have being offered in high schools and apprenticeship programs that are being offered, the development of science labs that are being created.

I just would like to point out that in the recent report that the CCPA tabled around the state of the inner city, they identified the significant improvement in the graduation rate that they—they said that the levels of educational attainment in the inner city also saw considerable improvement in 2011 compared to 1996. The percentage of inner city population 15 years and over with no high school certificate dropped significantly from 44.3 per cent in 1996 to 19.9 per cent in 2011. That is something that really needs to be celebrated because—as we have spoken numerous times about the impact of education to move people away from poverty; it allows them those opportunities for good jobs and employment and being able to support their family. Those are very significant.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you very much, and I certainly join the minister in regards to we want to see as many people as possible put through the education system and get a high school certificate, graduation certificate. I think that's good. But it certainly would be valuable—I mean, we saw the analysis from the University of Manitoba that suggested maybe as little as 32 per cent, if I remember correctly, of children involved in child and family services actually got a high school graduation. And we have seen numbers from some of the First Nation organizations that suggest that their numbers might even be lower than that, which is great cause concern.

So I think a little more analysis would help you focus where the work needs to be done. I know it's valuable that those that are already seeing fairly good high school graduation numbers get additional services in the high school that might help keep them engaged and get more kids through the system and with a higher or wider level of education that they can put to work. But there are still those that require additional focus. It seems to me that you want to work or focus on those that are in greatest need rather than those that you might like to work with.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Thank you very much. That is a loaded question. So thank you for reminding me about the acknowledgement about what we're doing as far as children that in—are in care and the supports that they require to be successful. We know that a child being removed from their home can be extremely traumatic. We know that a trauma that a child has seen in their life in their early years far exceeds what many of us will ever see in our own lifetime. And that requires us to provide them with a number of supports.

When the MCHP released their report, we very quickly responded by the development of a task group that is led by Professor Kevin Lamoureux and Tammy Christensen from Ndinawe. And our—they are tasked, with a number of other people, looking at what do we need to do different between the child-welfare system and family services and education. And some of those changes are as simple as ensuring if a child is removed from their home that we figure out a way to keep them within that home school. Within the—what are the transportation needs of that family? What do we need to—for that child? What do we need to do? So I think that those are significant but also providing the emotional supports that are required. When we—when children are in care, we talk about the loss of identity and belonging. And that can easily impact their ability to learn and to study. So we need to be very aware of their circumstances.

And I just—I must comment on your statement about, sort of, you know, working with the easier population. People that know me professionally and personally know that that's not really the group of people that I'm attracted to in supporting. It is what we would call the underdogs, the ones that have the most barriers, that I'm interested in making sure that we are able to remove those barriers. I—every child in this province deserves an opportunity, but I have, from an early, early age, always felt that my responsibility to—were to the ones that were facing the most barriers and wanted to ensure that I was part of the solutions of removing them so they could live a full and prosperous life.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I thank the minister for her comments, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, I would think that you would want to focus on those that you know had the greatest challenge in terms of achieving graduation, and certainly, knowing who that group was would certainly be—specifically would be valuable in that process. And so more—better information in terms of high school graduations

would be a useful tool for your—to achieve your goal as well as, I think, all Manitobans' goal.

* (11:10)

But I'll leave that and go on to teen birth rates, an area that considerable success has been achieved, and I certainly think that's good.

I just wondered if the minister would care to comment on how we've done here in Manitoba as compared to some other provinces.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Thank you very much for acknowledging what we've been able to accomplish and bring those—the numbers down. We know that indicators for families living in poverty, one of those indicators is a child that's been born to teen parents, and so we know that we have much more work to do in this indicator, but it is certainly trending in the right direction.

We are extremely proud of our partnerships with the regional health authorities across the province who have been leading the way with teen clinics, ensuring that we're getting the information out to young people, making sure that we are, you know, we have initiatives calling it Play it Safer Network and Safer Choices Northern, Safer Sex Supplies Distribution program we have. We're continuing to work with adolescents, and young people, and Health and provide these opportunities.

The information that we are gathering is specific to what's happening here in Manitoba, and as you have stated, we have seen a reduction. We're not going to stop with the initiatives that we've implemented. We're going to continue to do that work.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for her comments. I certainly would not want her to stop in one of the indicators where she's actually made some real progress, and certainly other provinces if—and it is always hard to compare across provincial boundaries, but other provinces have made significant progress in this area as well.

In terms of apprehensions related to CFS kids in care and pregnancies involved in that—and I know that there's been a fair bit of press around this earlier this year, and the minister commented that the main reason that many of the wards of care, when they gave birth, were—had their child apprehended was because of developmental or addiction issues. We followed up on that and attempted to find some numbers in this area, and we could find, really,

nothing. Manitoba Health didn't keep those types of information, in fact stated there was no way to get that measure.

Does the minister have some information available to her through the Child and Family Services process that tell her that nearly half of the baby apprehensions are due to developmental or addiction issues?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There are a number of statistical information that the Child and Family Services branch gathers to ensure that when we are evaluating certain trends within the system, that we're able to make educated decisions about how we move forward.

There's one other statistic, I think that is really important, is that a large percentage of these children are returned back to their birth parents within a year. And that is significant. We need to talk about what we're doing to prevent apprehensions happening at birth and that's about engaging families early on in the pregnancy, and providing them with the prenatal supports that they require, and coming up with a plan throughout that pregnancy so we can ensure that mom and babe can go home.

We all know the importance of those, well, those first moments, those first months and days and hours with a baby and that importance of bonding. When that isn't—if there are supports that are required, there are a number of supports that we have. Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata runs a home for young moms and their babies called Isabel's Place, and also Villa Rosa in Wolseley provides very good care and supervision and support, and then we have the mothering project at Mount Carmel Clinic who provides significant support to mothers of all ages that have had high-risk pregnancies and live high-risk lifestyles and have been able to, very successfully, engage the parents—the mothers—into providing them with support and ensuring that, if—that they have their children in their care but, if they don't, how do they maintain those close relationships with that child. So those are some very significant initiatives that are happening.

And, then, we also have, you know, in River East school division, a young parents program. We have, in the Youville Centre, young expectations that's being provided. So there are some initiatives that are happening and that will continue to happen.

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the minister listing off the many initiatives that are there, but what we were

really looking for was, was there any numerical support to the statement that nearly half of the children apprehended at—newborns apprehended actually had some form of medical detox or had some form of developmental or addiction issue, because we really haven't been able to find anything in the many FIPPAs we have filed, both with your department and with the Department of Health. We haven't been able to find anybody that tracks that.

So, if you have additional information, I would certainly request that you would supply that to us because it's an important statement. And, of course, as the children involved in Child and Family Services that are pregnant and giving birth that you are tracking here, you would also have a plan for them that could well include prenatal care. And is that not standard practice to have—if, once you become aware of a pregnancy issue, to get them engaged in prenatal care as much as possible?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, but also it's voluntary, too. Women have rights over their body and we need to make sure that we respect that.

So, yes, if you are speaking specifically to a child who is in care that becomes pregnant at the time, there are a number of supports that we will offer and provide. Also, I know that there are programs—specialized foster homes—that will take in a mom and their babe and provide those supports. So there are significant things that are happening.

We also believe that sharing information with young adults and teenagers around prevention is vitally important, too. Hence, our teen birth rate's going down. We're going to continue to provide that information and continue to provide the support. But, yes, of course, every woman who becomes pregnant has a right to prenatal care within this province, and all have access to it, too, because we have one system, not a two-tiered system.

Mr. Wishart: I would like to move on and talk a little bit about the Social Enterprise Strategy.

Certainly, I am a big fan of the ability that many of these social enterprises have to train people in services or in a occupation that clearly is important here in Manitoba. And, during the process of Housing Estimates, we talked a little bit about the BUILD group and the interaction between Manitoba Housing and BUILD, who often use them as part of their renovation strategy. However, in the last year, we had noticed a significant cut in that approach to that organization, and that they had had a significant

reduction in the amount of work that they had done for Manitoba Housing.

Now, it's part of the ALL Aboard strategy to talk about social enterprises. I just wondered if that particular project—if there was some reason why there had been a shift away from that, and is it indicative of other social enterprises?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I am extremely proud of Manitoba's Social Enterprise Strategy and the partnership that we have been able to develop with a number of social enterprises: Inner City Renovation, a North End renewal corporation, as well as BUILD in providing us with important services.

* (11:20)

They have done significant work on all of our deep refresh projects, as well as doing energy and water efficiency throughout all of our properties. We value their work. We ran into a bit of a glitch. We kept doing so much work we had to—we had a bit of a problem where we needed to create more opportunities for them

And so, yes, there was a reduction in the work that they were completing for us, but we worked very closely with them to ensure that in a very short time period, we could identify other initiatives that they could participate in. And I know going forward that there is a strong commitment made by Housing and Community Development to provide a certain value of work with BUILD and with other social enterprises, and I'm feeling very confident that we will continue to see their budget increase.

But you also have to realize that there are other departments that also can play a role within social enterprises, and we are working really hard to identify other opportunities. Whether it's in Education with PSFB and the building of schools, whether it is with MIT and road construction or whether it is in Family Services, social enterprises play a key role in supporting some of—some individuals who have been excluded from participating in our economy. And I think they need to be celebrated and valued, and I'm very pleased to hear the member speak very highly of the work that they do.

And we'll continue to support those investments that this government makes to provide opportunities for social enterprises and, more specifically, the men and women that work for them and the families that they support by the good work they do.

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the minister's comments in that regard, and certainly look forward to a reinvestment with social enterprises, in particular the BUILD organization, who I've worked with on a number of occasions.

In fact, we were fairly successful in getting Aki Energy, which is sort of a sub-branch of them, involved in our local First Nation, Long Plain, and I am very pleased to have them in the community and training people in the community. I think it's a very valuable approach to getting not only the quality of housing in that community improved but also to train a number of people.

In part of your Social Enterprise Strategy, you also make reference to the benefits of social impact bonds as a financial instrument that can be used to help improve the situation and move Social Enterprise Strategy forward. You care to make some comments on social impact bonds?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I will first go back to Aki Energy. Aki Energy happened because of the innovation of the social enterprise gurus in this province, and the one would be Shaun Loney and his partners that he worked with and the support that this government gave them to develop Aki Energy. And I'm so glad that they've been able to go to Long Plain, but that happened because of this investment and this—and the vision of this government to support social enterprises and the acknowledgement that First Nations communities deserve good quality housing and energy efficiency.

The member puts words in my mouth when he talks about social impact bonds. This government is not interested at all in privatizing social services, nor rewarding on giving—paying back people for investments. We are about supporting not-for-profit organizations and developing innovation and making sure that there is outcomes that are developed, but we are doing that in partnership with the not-for-profit organizations.

We have a very robust not-for-profit reduction-of-red-tape strategy that provides not-for-profit organizations with multi-year funding, provides them with opportunities around purchasing, looks at some of their issues about recruitment and HR, and I'm very pleased to say that we've expanded it from the original phase. I think it was around 18 agencies have joined us, again, with the not-for-profit, and then we've now yet again expanded it for phase 2.1, where we have opened up applications for single

departments not-for-profit organizations to get funding.

So, Mr. Chair, we're going to continue supporting not-for-profit organizations in the robust way that we have. We value the work that they do. They provide services all over this province to children, to families, to adults, to seniors. They start with home-care services. They provide educational services, child-care services. They are a valuable part of our province.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): One of the things which is of considerable concern when we look at poverty in Manitoba is the, you know, how we compare across the country. And a Campaign 2000 report from not very long ago, you know, has statistics which show the food bank use in Manitoba since 2008 has grown more than in other provinces, that the proportion of child poverty rates in Canada by provinces and territories from 1989 to 2012 shows that Manitoba is sitting at 29 per cent, which is a remarkably high number and higher than any other province and has gone up.

Now, I know the government likes to pick and choose how it measures child poverty, but this is an—or a cross-Canada comparison. And it's a report which comes out from, you know, individuals who have, you know, high integrity and who've done a lot of research in this area. They conclude—and I'll just read this: Something is wrong and children are paying the price. Manitoba's government, and I quote, has been saying they are concerned about child poverty and are doing something about it, but clearly, they're not doing it right or not doing enough. There's no denying the statistics: more children are living in poverty. And they go on to conclude, because child poverty in Manitoba is a simmering disaster with little potential for improvement under current efforts, clearly there needs to be some consideration of a change in direction here.

And if one looks at the, you know, the ALL Aboard report as an example, let me look at the post-secondary education participation. And, to my surprise, the participation in the post secondary—post-secondary education by people age 18-34 years has been going down since 2008. And I wonder if the minister would comment on why the proportion of people—doesn't matter whether it's 18-24 or 25-29 or 30-34 years; they're all going down with the slight exception of those who are 30-34 years. And why is this happening? Can the minister,

you know, comment on what's going on and why post-secondary education participation has been going down in the last number of years in Manitoba?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I just would like to speak to the first part of your question where you talked about our government's measurement. And our government's measurement has consistently been the Market Basket Measure, which is MBM. It's an absolute measure that's based on the actual cost of living in Manitoba. And in using that ranking, we can demonstrate that there has been a reduction of children in care—or not—in children living in poverty. And we can also demonstrate that we're ranked fifth among the provinces. That's significant. So we can continue to have this debate about what measurement is the best, but we're going to continue to use the MBM, as we have consistently used it. There will be many advocates that choose a number of any of those other rates. And the one thing we have to remember is that you can't compare those different rates because they're after tax, before tax, purchasing power. Like, I—we have to be very, very careful.

* (11:30)

Now, your last part of your question was why is there such a fluctuation in the post-secondary participation rate. Well, we, too, are asking ourselves that question and trying to evaluate what has been happening. I think what's important to recognize is that we have the most affordable tuition that's made available to our students. We have a robust bursary program that ensures that there is accessibility. Could it be partly because of the great employment opportunities that are being made available to Manitobans? That could be part of the theory. People are not accessing post-secondary; people are going into the—finding work.

What I do know is that this government is going to continue to make investments. When across this country post-secondary institutions are being faced with reductions in their budgets, we have continued to increase it. I think it's at the rate of inflation that we're doing that and making significant capital improvements too because, yes, the operating money is vitally important. And we continue to have those conversations with the presidents of the organizations, but we also know that they need the infrastructure. We also know that we want an engineering building that has the top equipment available to them. We want to make sure that the roof isn't falling in on them. We want to make sure that we're able to provide those opportunities.

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being past 11:30, which was agreed upon, what's the will of the committee?

Mr. Wishart: Continue on for 15 minutes or so and then evaluate.

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

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I think the—you know, this assessment which I quoted and the document which I have which was put out by Sid Frankel and Dennis Lewycky, both of whom are very well qualified and knowledgeable and, you know, need to be given some credit for the integrity and the worth of that document.

But let me come back to the post-secondary education participation issue. You know, one of the things that I consistently hear is that too many of those who graduate from our universities are actually having difficulty finding jobs in Manitoba and that—so we're seeing a net movement of too many of these to other provinces. Now, that's not to say that there aren't some areas in Manitoba where there are real opportunities, and particularly there's a need in the technical areas and the trades. And one of the things which I remember—in 1999, the NDP commitment was to double the number of people attending colleges in Manitoba. And as I look at those numbers, you know, going back to 1999, the proportion or the number of students in community—or in colleges has not actually doubled, that, in fact, it sort of, you know, levelled out and maybe even declined in the last couple of years. And I'd ask, you know, why is this? Is the government not putting the priority that one would've expected on ensuring that there's, you know, adequate spaces in training in our colleges?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I think the—what you quote was that we were going to be doubling the apprenticeship rates or participation in the province.

We have continued to make capital investment across the province. You know the investment that we've made in UCN and have provided it. We have gone and started a mining institute in Flin Flon, I think it is. We've also made record investments in Red River College ensuring that they have access and can create more spaces. Assiniboine Community College, as well, in Brandon, is another example of where we've made those investments in making sure—I think we call them spaces or spots for students to participate.

We are very fortunate in the employment rate being the—our unemployment rate being the lowest in

Canada is significant. We're going to continue to be able to create jobs and training opportunities for individuals. And that happens by making sure that we have opportunities while they're in high school, that there are level 1 apprentices that are being given opportunities.

Mr. Vice-Chairperson in the Chair

We have over 1,000 high school students that are participating in a level 1 apprenticeship program, so we're continuing to expand those opportunities in high school as well. We've spent around \$30 million in ensuring that they have access to the infrastructure and the tools that they need in order to work towards an apprenticeship program.

Mr. Gerrard: I note that one of the indicators which deals with the prevalence of chronic disease and—the measure is age and sex, adjusted so that any changes would not be a result of an ageing population because it's adjusted for age and sex.

And what is of concern is that, when we look at the situation with diabetes, the prevalence has gone up. When we look at the prevalence of hypertension in their graph, specifically for lowest and highest income quintiles, both of those incidences have gone up. And the prevalence of arthritis, the lowest in income quintiles—rural and urban Manitoba—have gone up.

So I would just express a little bit of concern in terms of, you know, what's happening in this area and what the government is doing or not doing that would have identified this as an issue of concern, and what approach is being taken to address the rising incidence of chronic diseases.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Well, there are a number of specific initiatives that are happening across the province—and led, as you say, by health and the regional health authorities—to ensure that we're giving people the information that they need, access—if they need medication, access to that medication with our very, very good Pharmacare program that we have.

One thing that you will—may not see within these numbers is that, because of the treatments we're able to provide, in some instances people are living longer with their chronic diseases, which is significant. But I think what you're trying to get at is how do we prevent it from happening in the first place, because, for some of these, they're very preventable. And that would go to talking about our smoking sensation program and the record investments we've made with a number of those initiatives. The patch program that

we have, the smokers' hotline that we have, the education that's being provided by our front-line health-care providers is vitally important and making sure that they're available and accessible to all Manitobans.

When we talk about diabetes, we really—it's very clear that it is—type 2 diabetes is very much related to exercise and food, and we need to make sure that we are providing Manitobans with the access to good-quality food and providing them with the education so they can make the right choice.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

And I think that as we continue, we acknowledge we have a lot of work to do in very—in some specific communities, and we need to ensure that they have access to good-quality food.

So social enterprises is another one of those examples about providing food. I know that Shaun Loney, I think it's through Aki, was also very instrumental in doing some development of gardens in remote communities and is very proud of that work.

So we're going to continue to support that development. The education that we did around the canning programs that we've had as well as the freezer program that's been offered by ANA, those are all significant.

I think that this is an area—you're correct—that we need to—we've made some investments, but we have a lot more work to do and we're committed to do that.

* (11:40)

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I think that it's disappointing when one measures the performance of the government in addressing prevention that clearly we're falling short of where we should be.

And that's really the point that I would like to make, and stress that it's important to make the measurements but it's also important to have a clear plan to make sure that the issues are addressed and that the changes are made. And I think a lot of us are quite concerned that the results aren't quite as good as we would hope that they—or we would think that they really should be.

So, with those comments, Mr. Chair, that's the end of my questions. Thank you.

Mr. Wishart: I believe we're ready to let this go to vote.

Mr. Chairperson: Hearing no other questions.

Annual Report of the Manitoba Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy (ALL Aboard) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2014—pass.

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

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no, so the report is not passed.

This concludes the business before us. Before we rise, I would—it would be appreciated if the members would leave behind any unused copies of the report that may be collected and reused for the next meeting.

The hour being 11:42, what is the will of the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Committee rise.

Mr. Chairperson: Committee rise. Thank you.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 11:42 p.m.

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