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**Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills  
and Social Development and the Status of  
Persons with Disabilities**

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**Thursday, December 3, 2009**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Dean Allison**



## Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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• (0905)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)):** Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), our study of the federal contribution to reducing poverty in Canada will commence.

I just want to take a second to thank the witnesses for being here today. Thank you for taking the time out of your schedules to not only offer up some things that you guys are doing on the ground, but also some recommendations for us as a committee to take back to the government. I think you probably know we've been across the country doing this, and some of the other MPs may talk about that. We've been north and west and east and south, so we're just wrapping up what we've been doing over the last year to two years.

Just as a housekeeping note in terms of the devices here, Mr. Lessard will be asking his questions in French, so I'll give you a chance to put on your headsets before that happens.

I'm going to start, John, with you, if you'd like. We'll give you the floor for seven minutes, and then we'll see Bill, and then we'll go around the room and ask some questions.

John, welcome, and the floor is yours, sir.

**Mr. John Kolkman (Research and Policy Analysis Coordinator, Edmonton Social Planning Council):** Thank you.

On behalf of the Edmonton Social Planning Council, I am pleased to participate in these hearings. The Edmonton Social Planning Council is an independent, non-profit social research organization that focuses on issues of poverty and low income. Our goal is to build a more healthy, just, and inclusive community. In the past decade, poverty rates have fallen in Alberta because of the strong economy and, in recent years, modest re-investment in social programs. Yet in 2006, at the height of Alberta's recent economic boom, there were still 77,595 Alberta children living in poverty. That's over 1 in 10.

If history is any guide, in the absence of additional investments by federal and provincial governments, it's almost certain that poverty rates will go up in this recession. This increase could be significant—Alberta has seen the number of those unemployed more than double in the past year. Rising unemployment is falling disproportionately on vulnerable groups, including youth, aboriginal people, recent immigrants, and those earning low wages. Seven of Canada's 10 provinces, representing more than two out of three Canadians, are planning or implementing poverty reduction strategies. A multi-

sector coalition has been formed in Alberta, which is one of the three provinces that has not yet adopted a strategy. We're urging the Government of Alberta to do so. The federal government should support the development of a national poverty reduction strategy that complements the initiatives under way in the provinces.

How can the federal government most effectively keep the momentum of poverty reduction going while counteracting the effects of the recession? Today I'm going to make a pitch for further investment in the child tax benefit system as an important component of a national poverty reduction strategy. The Canada child tax benefit and the national child benefit supplement already reduce child and family poverty significantly. The Caledon Institute of Social Policy has calculated that existing child tax benefits reduce the number of children living in low income by 38%, more than a third. Child tax benefits are available to all families regardless of the source of income, working poor as well as those on income support. Low-income families receive the maximum benefit, with benefit levels gradually diminishing as family income rises.

This year's federal budget made a modest additional investment in child tax benefits by raising the upper limit on the net family income required to receive the maximum benefit. However, much more could be done as government revenues recover in the coming years.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council proposes that child tax benefits be increased by \$400 per child in the next benefit years, starting July 1, 2010. There should be further real increases of \$200 per year in the following four benefit years. To help pay for this proposal, the non-refundable child tax credit should be eliminated. It is a poorly targeted program, disproportionately benefiting higher-income families. The \$1.5 billion in savings from eliminating the non-refundable credit should instead be invested in the refundable benefit, allowing it to be increased by about \$200 annually at no extra cost to government. The ESPC's position is that further increases to child tax benefits should be made to the basic benefits, with indexing of only the NCBS portion in future years. This avoids creating a poverty wall caused by the already steep phase-out of the supplement as family income rises.

We propose that benefit reduction phase-out rates remain the same as those currently existing. Applying the real increases in child tax benefits to the basic benefits will also assist more Canadian families with the cost of raising children, thereby helping to offset the loss of the non-refundable child tax credit.

● (0910)

The universal child care benefit should be retained, in our view, for all Canadian families with children, as it provides extra support to younger families with preschool-aged children. While it is not a child care program as such, it does help younger families pay a portion of their child care costs. Obviously child care costs are an issue with preschool children, so I think there is an argument for retaining the UCCB. It's also worth remembering that the UCCB replaced the supplement for children under seven that existed prior to July 2006. However, the UCCB should be non-taxable, indexed, and better integrated with the overall child tax benefit system.

Unfortunately, I don't believe you have a copy of the table I presented. I'd be happy to answer questions, but I did present a table with an assumed indexing rate of 2.5% and estimated the additional cost of the recommended changes we are proposing to the child tax benefit system. I'd be happy to answer any questions you have in that regard, because it is a little bit hard to kind of explain the numbers in the absence of your having the table in front of you.

One of the things we're proposing is that these benefit increases be phased in over a period of five years, which recognizes the constraints the current economic recession is placing on federal government revenue and expenditure. As the economy recovers, the federal government will have an increasing capacity to make these investments in Canada's children.

Previous research has documented the vital role child tax benefits play in reducing both the incidence and depth of poverty among Canadian families with children. Based on this research, the Edmonton Social Planning Council estimates its proposal could lift an additional one in five Canadian children out of poverty once it's fully implemented.

In conclusion, the Edmonton Social Planning Council congratulates the HUMA committee for its leadership role in studying the most effective ways to reduce and eventually eliminate poverty in Canada. In terms of reducing child and family poverty, there is no better investment or more effective delivery vehicle than strengthening child tax benefits. Our children are worth it.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Kolkman.

We're going to turn it over to Bill Moore-Kilgannon.

The floor is yours, sir, for seven minutes.

**Mr. Bill Moore-Kilgannon (Executive Director, Public Interest Alberta):** I'm grateful. Thank you very much, and welcome to all of you. *Je vous souhaite la bienvenue ici en Alberta.*

I'm the executive director of Public Interest Alberta. We're a provincial network of many organizations of individuals advocating on a number of key public interest issues. Our mandate is to advocate for better-quality public services, so we've been working

with students and faculty associations of all of the universities, colleges, and technical institutes across Alberta. We're working with many seniors' organizations, community groups, and others on issues related to poverty with respect to seniors, post-secondary education, and a number of issues that obviously any comprehensive poverty elimination plan would deal with.

We have just completed seven forums around the province looking at what Alberta can do to establish a comprehensive poverty elimination strategy. In these, we have been working with many groups throughout the province: these forums were hosted by United Ways; we partnered with a number of municipalities; the City of Edmonton was a sponsor of our forum here in Edmonton; and we've connected with front-line community organizations throughout Alberta who have been working for decades on the issues of poverty.

The report we have completed and released on November 24 is called "We Must Do Better: It's Time to Make Alberta Poverty-Free". We will make it available to you. Obviously again, without the time to have it translated, it's not before you today, but it is available on our website, and we will make it available to you. What we are looking for is that all levels of government work together, and what we heard, particularly from municipalities, is that cities throughout Alberta are deeply concerned about poverty.

The mayor of Medicine Hat came and spoke at our forum to kick it off. He is the former chief of police in Medicine Hat, and he talked passionately about what he saw as a front-line police officer, the interconnection between crime and poverty, and the need to not only reduce poverty but to look at what we can do to prevent poverty in the long term. Everywhere we travelled we heard that community agencies are being stretched to the maximum. They feel as if they are pulling people out of a river but are unable to know why more and more people are coming down the stream, to use the metaphor that I'm sure you've heard.

At a time when the provincial government is looking at cutting \$2 billion out of its budget for next year, everyone is deeply concerned about the impact that's going to have on people in poverty. Working closely with the Social Planning Council here, we find the statistics show that at the height of the boom we still had a poverty issue—even in good economic times—because of the high cost of living. People are struggling to be able to pay the rent, feed the kids, and not everyone is rising in their boats.

Today in Alberta, one out of four people who are employed—that's excluding unemployed people—are making less than \$15 an hour. Even in the wealthiest province in Canada you see that number—25% of people earning less than \$15 an hour. That's not just people like my son, who is 17 years of age and living at home and earning a little extra money. More than 50% of those people are over the age of 24, and two-thirds of the people earning less than \$15 an hour are women. We need to take a look at this in terms of a perspective of how that impacts young families or all people as we move forward.

What we also saw was that the economic downturn, of course, impacted much greater on low-wage workers—83,000 people have been laid off in Alberta since last October. The vast majority of those were people earning less than \$10 an hour. On the higher end of the scale, we've actually had job increases. For people earning more than \$30 or \$40 an hour, there have been increases.

This is a time when services are being cut. That means higher transfers of costs of services onto individuals, whether that is increasing tuition rates or access to various services. Certainly, the cost of seniors' services in Alberta is increasing rapidly.

• (0915)

But we are here to talk about solutions today, and as you've undoubtedly heard across the country, there is no one cause of poverty and therefore no one solution to poverty. There's no reason to say we're just going to do one or two things. Ultimately, a comprehensive plan needs to work together so that one thing is not being increased over here and you're losing the benefits on the other side of it.

We see that with education and lifelong learning, where barriers to accessing post-secondary education or lifelong learning opportunities are keeping so many low-wage workers in situations where they can't move forward. So ultimately I hope you'll look at what barriers are preventing people from accessing services and education to change their situations.

I want to talk about early childhood education and care, because all of these things are interrelated. If a young single mom is unable to find quality child care or afford it, she's unable to go back to school to get training. She's trapped in a low-wage job that she may be losing.

Alberta has a very market-based system of child care. Even though, compared to other provinces, we have what appear to be generous subsidies for our child care system, because our market-based system doesn't regulate the prices, the amounts families pay over and above the subsidies available to them actually are far too prohibitive for low-wage workers. The province announced that last year they didn't spend \$19.2 million—roughly 10% of their total provincial budget—on child care last year because of under-subscription of subsidies.

I have been talking to the province about the fact that low-wage workers are unable to afford \$300 or \$400 on top of what they would receive in subsidies, so they're not putting their children into licensed care and are not eligible for subsidies. Any funding that is coming forward to support the development of a quality early childhood education and care system needs to look at making sure that subsidies going in are actually reducing and limiting the amount that families are paying—ideally down to zero for many low-wage families that need that care.

As I'm sure you've heard, access to early childhood education and care is one of the best investments we could be making. But we need to look at the barriers and recognize that the market system we have here, as in many other provinces, is ultimately barring many low-wage people from accessing the care they need in order to get training and education.

The concern is that the current universal child care benefit, as John has pointed out, isn't really building a child care system, just as giving money to drivers wouldn't build roads. Giving money to families is important. I'm not saying you should get rid of that, but ultimately we need to build a quality child care system so that parents actually do have choices at the end of the day.

There are waiting lists of two to three years in this city to access quality child care. Many families do not have the resources to get it, even if they were able to get through the long waiting lists.

In closing, I have one other concern about federal-provincial relations. The federal government has put forward money to all the provinces to create more child care spaces. Initially when that money came forward to the Province of Alberta it was dumped into general revenues and was not given to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to create more child care spaces. We made a big noise about that in the media here in Alberta, and the following year the \$25.9 million that was transferred from the federal government was put into a space creation grant.

My understanding is that money is transferred year over year, based on a per capita percentage. But in the fiscal report on the Ministry of Children and Youth Services for the year that just ended there is no recognition of the federal contribution to the space creation grant in last year's budget for the provincial government.

• (0920)

In a province that is screaming for more quality child care and education and that has long waiting lists, the fact that there is apparently no accountability in terms of the federal dollars that have been transferred to create child care spaces in this province is a shame and needs to be looked at. For any programs that you are putting in place, you need to make sure, if it is a cost sharing or money transferred to the provinces, that money is actually going to go into the programs for which it was designated by the federal government.

With that, thank you very much for hosting this. I really appreciate the opportunity to be here.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Bill, for your presentation.

We are now going to move over to Bev Matthiessen, from the Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities.

Bev, welcome. The floor is yours. You have seven minutes for your presentation. After that we will go around to have MPs ask some follow-up questions.

**Ms. Bev Matthiessen (Executive Director, Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities):** Thank you very much.

I apologize for the kerfuffle coming in late. I was asked to step in for someone at the last minute.

My name is Bev Matthiessen, and I'm the executive director of a small non-profit organization called the Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities. We are provincial, we're cross-disability, and we're an advocacy group. All of our board members have disabilities and some of our staff members have disabilities. We are the provincial affiliate of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities. I am sure you have heard of that group.

Based on Statistics Canada's PALS 2006, people with disabilities make up 16.5% of the adult population, or nearly 4.2 million people. For people with disabilities, the poverty rate is 14.4%, comprising nearly 600,000 people.

The definition of poverty for me, as someone who is working on the front line, is like the phone call I received yesterday from someone who is living on an income support program and can't pay the rent. They don't have enough money from the \$1,188 to afford the rent in Calgary, Fort McMurray, and other places, which is \$800 and up, leaving them around \$300 to buy food, to have any kind of quality of life such as being able to go to a movie or have coffee with a friend, to have transportation to be able to get to work, to a volunteer job, or even to get an education.

Canadians with disabilities are more than twice as likely to live in poverty as other Canadians. The incidence of poverty among aboriginal people with disabilities is even higher. People with disabilities face exclusion from quality education, employment, and from participation in their communities. Compared to men with disabilities, women with disabilities face additional economic disadvantage. Historically women with disabilities have experienced lower rates of participation in the labour force, less access to income support programs, and higher rates of poverty.

Having a disability means, for many people, living in poverty for their whole lifetime, living on an income support program or social assistance that pays at best \$14,000 and at worst less than \$7,000 a year. Many persons with disabilities look forward to turning 65 so that they can get a better income.

The Government of Canada has committed to bringing forward a federal disability act. Canadians with disabilities will support the proposed act, which hopefully will address disability issues and allocate resources for improving access and inclusion and ensuring a strong enforcement of the act.

My recommendations here today are to make the disability tax credit refundable. At present only those with taxable income receive any benefit from the disability tax credit. Make those eligible for a Canada pension automatically eligible for the disability tax credit. Make the Canada Pension Plan disability benefits non-taxable.

Update the National Building Code of Canada to ensure universal design principles are respected. Develop accessibility regulations for federally regulated modes of transportation, and restructure the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Accessible Transportation. Create a universal design centre that would become a centre of excellence in universal design and become a resource to governments, community, and the private sector.

Re-establish the parliamentary committee on the status of Canadians with disabilities to address the ongoing concerns of Canadians with disabilities and submit to Parliament an annual report on the status of Canadians with disabilities.

Work with band councils to ensure equal access to disability-related supports for first nations people with disabilities living on reserve.

The Government of Canada must create the national socio-economic and political conditions for people with disabilities to

empower themselves and to achieve their full potential. Work with the provinces and territories to explore ways of increasing access to and improving the range of available disability supports, and work with the provinces and territories to provide support for the building of safe, affordable, accessible, and supportive housing.

On the call that I received yesterday, there are over 12,000 people in Calgary waiting for subsidized housing. The person I talked to will never get on the list because other people have higher priority.

Enhance disability supports to enable independent living, active citizenship, and full participation.

There is a shared vision for an inclusive and accessible Canada and consensus among the disability community.

• (0925)

An inclusive and accessible Canada is a Canada where Canadians with disabilities have the necessary support to fully access and benefit from all that Canada has to offer, where independent living, principles of choice, consumer control, and autonomy are made real. Canadians would have safe, adequate, accessible housing and would not be relegated to living in institutions and confining places. Canadians with disabilities and their families would have appropriate income, aids and devices, personal supports, medications, and environmental accommodations that make social, economic, cultural, and political citizenship accessible and inclusive to all.

Women with disabilities, aboriginal people with disabilities, persons with disabilities from visible minorities, and those from other marginalized communities would be equally able to access all aspects of and benefit from Canadian society. Canadians with invisible disabilities, chronic illness, episodic disabilities, or environmental sensitivities, or living in rural or remote areas would be equally able to access and benefit from Canadian society. The result would be that the people of Canada would be able to contribute to and benefit from Canadian society in the same way as other Canadians.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Matthiessen.

We're going to start with the Liberals.

Mr. Savage, you have the floor for seven minutes, sir.

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you. Those were very good presentations, very helpful to us, and with specific recommendations, which is really what we're looking for.

We've been travelling through this part of the country. We were in Vancouver on Monday, Whitehorse on Tuesday, Yellowknife yesterday, and we're here today. The committee is going to Winnipeg tomorrow. Everybody on the committee is very committed to coming up with something in terms of an anti-poverty strategy.

We get along very well, crammed into tiny planes and meeting rooms, but today I woke up and I was pissed when I read the *Globe and Mail*. I was so mad when I read this. I hate it when I'm right—and it may not be that often. I've always said that the perfect storm, in a negative sense, for people who are working on the front lines against poverty is that you go into a recession where there are already people who are poor, the government decides to spend massive amounts of money, but it doesn't reach the poor. Then you have to pay for the money that was spent, and what happens?

Here's the headline in the *Globe and Mail* today: "The price of stimulus: Here come the cuts." It says "Staffing budgets for public servants will be tightened and grant money for non-profits nationwide is expected to become scarce."

What is it now? How much stimulus money did the social agencies in Edmonton get?

• (0930)

**Mr. Bill Moore-Kilgannon:** Is that a question, sir?

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Yes. I don't mean to sound angry at you.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Bill Moore-Kilgannon:** I don't know if you read the *Edmonton Journal* this morning, but it says, "Woman fears for safety in budget cut", and "Group home's weekend closure will put violence-prone men on the street."

There's a picture there of me back when I used to have a beard.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** No, I didn't see it.

**Mr. Bill Moore-Kilgannon:** The provincial government, even though we have significant resources and savings, is choosing to cut many of the agencies that, as you indicate, are very stretched already. Adults with developmental disabilities are taking a \$10 million cut this year. Unfortunately, that wasn't announced many months ago. This \$10 million cut has to be implemented in the last quarter of this fiscal year, so agencies have been just told in this city yesterday that they're cutting \$3 million to all the agencies that serve adults with developmental disabilities. They have to make those cuts now, and they've been told to brace for 10% to 15% cuts for next year.

The staff in this province had been promised a 5% wage increase. These are staff who are already earning incredibly low wages. Usually front-line staff working in group homes can make \$12 or \$13 an hour, \$15 an hour at most. And they were told that they weren't going to get that 5% wage increase this year. They're going to get a 0% increase. There are 18,000 people who work with adults with developmental disabilities in this province. In the last couple of years they've had a 40% staff turnover rate, so the agencies are constantly recruiting staff. The staff are not necessarily able to be well trained, so the quality of service is declining.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Are you suggesting that there wasn't a lot of stimulus money that made its way to those people you refer to?

**Mr. Bill Moore-Kilgannon:** None, none whatsoever.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** The people who are working on the front lines, the non-profits, have not been the beneficiaries of the stimulus. Somebody mentioned that in fact it was the low-wage-income people who were losing jobs. In my own area in Nova Scotia, stimulus money would go to move, actually, in some cases, skilled workers from one job to another, but the poor got nothing out of that. So we have this awful situation now where we have to pay for the stimulus.

Also, in the budget, the tax cuts that came into play are permanent. Those measures that allegedly would have helped those who are less well off were temporary—EI extensions and social housing.

I guess you didn't have to be Kreskin to know that the poor were going to come out of this worse off than when they went into it, but I thought there would be some level at some point where people would want to at least look at those who didn't benefit from stimulus, who were on the low level going in, in terms of government support. I can't think of a group any more important than persons with disabilities.

CACL, CCD—these organizations aren't getting lots of public money, and if anybody deserves support in our community... We know that aboriginal Canadians are hurting, as are single parents, but persons with disabilities in a country like Canada, which doesn't have a Canadians with disabilities act... We often look at the American social services system as much inferior to our own, but the Americans have an Americans with Disabilities Act.

How are you going to do the work you do?

• (0935)

**Mrs. Bev Matthiessen:** It's getting harder every day, and I'll tell you a story. Last year in my organization—I've been there 18 years now—we had a profit of \$7,900, and I received a phone call asking if that came out of our provincial dollars. Was that \$7,900 left over from our provincial dollars? And if so, we would have to give it back.

Just trying to keep a non-profit going.... The fellow I spoke to yesterday on the phone, who had the high rent and was living on \$300 for food and so on...after I hung up, I said, "What is going to happen to that person?" And there are just thousands of people like that. I do not know where they're going to end up. They don't have places to live. They don't have adequate food, and they really need help, and we need to help them.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** The government is not doing the job that one would think governments should do in a country like Canada. So you're asked to pick up that slack, and now the meagre budget that social agencies like your own have is going to be slashed. It concerns me. I don't want to go any further than that.

I want to ask a question of John—

**Mr. John Kolkman:** I just want to make a comment as well, because I agree with you generally that in terms of both the federal and provincial governments, there's a tendency to cut initiatives that are important to low-income Canadians, low-income Albertans, when governments start to run into deficit problems, and I think this has occurred regardless of the political stripe of the government. Some of the most severe cuts that we saw actually were from the Martin government, when they were trying to balance the books in the early 1990s. So I think it is important to try not to make the same mistakes this time. And you asked—

**Mr. Michael Savage:** But it's not all tax benefits in 1997 that you refer to. A Caledon report you refer to, which I carry with me as my bible, has indicated that that's making.... What is a measure that this current government has done for people? You mentioned that they invested in the child tax benefit. The lowest income got nothing.

**Mr. John Kolkman:** That's true.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Absolutely nothing. They were shut out completely. You invest in a benefit for people in low income and you say the lowest of the low get nothing.

**Mr. John Kolkman:** Well, that's because of the way it was passed through, because of the increase in the way the benefit is structured. The people who received most of the benefit were people who had incomes at the edge of the first income tax bracket, so you're right. In fact it was something that I was very critical of at the time, that there was no increase to people below \$20,000, and most of the increase, which was still needed, went to people more in the \$20,000 to \$40,000 income category. So you're quite right, and that's the reason why I think the base benefit needs to be adjusted for everyone. But it's because of the way the particular adjustment was done.

I will say, in terms of the federal stimulus dollars, one area where there were some additional dollars provided this year in the federal budget was to affordable housing. I believe the number was \$59 million to the Province of Alberta, and the unfortunate thing there was that the provincial government withdrew dollars. They withdrew more than a dollar for every additional federal dollar that was put into additional funding for affordable housing, and in my view that was extremely unfortunate and counterproductive.

The other area where there was some benefit in this year's budget—I didn't address it—was the working income tax benefit, which basically is a wage supplementation initiative for low-wage workers. That benefit was, I think, almost doubled in the recent budget. So the federal government has done some good things, and I just hope—

**Mr. Michael Savage:** I agree with that, and I mentioned the working income tax benefit. But John, look at the affordable housing. When it was announced, the minister couldn't say quickly enough that this is a one-time thing. Meanwhile, the tax cuts that I get and that all the members of this committee get, in making over \$150,000 a year, are permanent. And that's why coming out of this stimulus now.... It's going to be the poor who get hit.

And listen, this is as partisan as I've been all week, but I'm pissed off when I look at the *Globe and Mail* and I see that the poor in this country are going to have to pay for the stimulus money. This is an absolute sham, and it's a disgrace. It's a disgrace to this nation.

**The Chair:** Okay. We're going to finish off with that. We're going to leave it at that. And I've been good at not being partisan either, but I'm going to leave it at that, too. I'm not going to say anything.

I will ask you to put your headsets on if you need translation. Then we'll let Mr. Lessard.... We don't want to cut into his time for asking questions.

Mr. Lessard, sir, I'm going to turn the floor over to you. You have seven minutes.

• (0940)

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would also like to thank the witness for his testimony this morning.

No matter where we go, we always learn something surprising. I come from Quebec. We had the impression that the phenomenon of strong economic performance had favoured western Canada. I think that is indeed the case. We also had the impression that the wealth was more evenly split. This time, I see that is not so. This morning, my colleague, Mr. Savage, is outraged, and I think more of us should be outraged at this ongoing situation.

I want to come back to two things that were said this morning. According to Mr. Moore-Kilgannon, the solution has to be a comprehensive one. I want to point out that the House of Commons unanimously adopted a motion in 1989 to eliminate poverty, especially among children, before the year 2000. And here we are today.

Now I want to come back to something Mr. Kolkman said. He pointed out that good economic performance had improved things slightly. That was also the finding of Campaign 2000: poverty improved, in other words, there were fewer poor people, but it was due to strong economic performance. So that means that the measures we adopted were not in vain.

It is my understanding that your concern has to do with the fact that there are no measures that are effective on an ongoing basis. What should we take that to mean? You are on the ground, and you see how things are changing, so could you tell us whether we are in a situation that I would not necessarily call desperate, but where there is no way out? I always come back to what you said about needing a comprehensive solution. What would that comprehensive solution be?

**Mr. Bill Moore-Kilgannon:** Who should answer that question, Jacques or me?

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Both of you can respond. It could just as easily be put to Ms. Matthiessen, as well.

Alberta's society is made up of 50% women and 50% men, which is rather unique. Elsewhere, women outnumber men.



Furthermore, we see that women are not treated the same as men. In terms of income, for instance, men have an average income of \$33,260 a year, while women have an average income of \$20,823 a year. The difference is clear. I find it difficult to imagine the situation of an aboriginal woman with a disability.

My question is for all three of you. This is the challenge we will face in putting forward our report recommendations. I am asking all three of you. What is the comprehensive solution?

**Mr. Bill Moore-Kilgannon:** I will go first.

There is not just a single solution; it is more of an action plan. As I said, you need a plan where all the elements work together. As we have seen, if the federal government puts money towards an action plan to help the homeless and the provincial government cuts that same amount, it doesn't do anything. That is why it is really important for all levels of government to work together.

In my opinion, it is important to ensure that day care centres, for instance, are not just places to take children while parents work; they need to be part of an action plan that creates child care centres that educate children and support families.

Here, in Alberta, with our market-based child care system, there are no programs for families. There is really nothing to assist families or help them access other social programs, financial aid, all of that. Family centres can really do that, but if we give money to families or the provincial government just to create day care centres, we see that nothing changes. It is really important that the action plan require provinces to cooperate, and we need to ensure that the money is used properly, to really reduce poverty here.

• (0945)

[English]

**Mr. John Kolkman:** Thank you for that question.

You had mentioned strong economic performance. Certainly in Alberta, since the late 1990s until about a year ago, we had a very strong economy. Probably that was the main contributor to some reduction in poverty in the first years of the 21st century. Having said that, I remind you that even at the height of the boom in 2006, we still had one in 10 children in Alberta living in poverty. That was an improvement. It got as bad as about one in five children in the mid-1990s.

So there was some improvement, and certainly the strong economy is probably the main reason for that. But also, as I had said, some reinvestment in social programs played a role. The provincial government stopped making cuts and even did some modest reinvestment in some of the social programs.

To give a little bit of credit to the federal government during this period of time, after the cuts to the transfers to the provinces in the mid-1990s by the federal government as well as the complete elimination of affordable housing dollars by the federal government, there were in fact—and to get back to my pitch here—some real increases in the child tax benefits that flowed starting in the late 1990s and through the early years of 2000, even beyond inflation.

We had some difficulty with some of them because much of those benefits, when they first started taking place, were kind of clawed back by the provinces by reductions in their social assistance

payments. So the true benefit of those increases in child tax benefits weren't realized by low-income families. But the last couple of times there were real increases in child tax benefits, the province didn't do the clawbacks. I really think it's important not to.

There are solutions. There really are solutions to reducing poverty in this country, and I think one indicator of that is that every year we try to measure in Alberta the effectiveness of government income transfers. There's been some improvement. In the 1990s, only about one in four children—and families with children—were lifted out of poverty by government transfers. That's now improved to about 40%, four out of 10. So we went from one in four to about four out of 10.

I would actually say that the enhancements to the child tax benefit system have been primarily responsible for that improvement. That's why I think it's such an effective program. As federal government revenues recover from the recession, we need to get back to what we did around the turn of the century where each year we were actually increasing child tax benefits by more than even the rate of inflation, because it's a very effective way to reduce child and family poverty in particular. We need to get back to that.

I guess that's my pitch.

• (0950)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

We'll come back. Maybe we could try to get you in a subsequent question. We're over time and we're trying to move to Mr. Martin.

Sir, you have the floor for seven minutes.

**Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP):** Thanks for coming this morning.

The work we do is critical to the livelihoods of thousands of families and individuals across the country, and we want to make sure we get it right. It's important for us to be here in Edmonton. We were up in Yellowknife and Whitehorse for the last couple of days, and it gave us a sense of the challenge that exists in that part of the country.

Mr. Savage is correct when he says we have an even bigger problem looming ahead of us right now. This committee is one of the better committees working out of Ottawa. It tries to find common solutions and generally drops the partisan rancour that often gets in the way of good work being done. I think we will probably find a way to table a report that will make a difference. The question is, how would we pay for it? The proposals we put forward—whether it's income security, a national housing program, or a national child care program—all cost money and somebody has to pay.

Mr. Savage mentioned yesterday in the hearings that we need a discussion about taxation—fair taxation, progressive taxation, taxation that actually works in the interests of those who most need it, so that they can participate in society and live with some dignity. Why not start today?

For the most part, middle-class Canada wants to pay less taxes. What they want to see in every budget that comes down is a tax reduction. They don't seem to understand—or maybe they're just turning a blind eye—that with every tax reduction there is less money in the government coffers to pay for programs to help those in need.

Government doesn't usually do stuff that the general public isn't willing to support. Ultimately, we all have to go back to our constituents and make a case for staying in office based on what we stand for. If we're willing to stand up and say we're going to make tax cuts, chances are we'll get re-elected. If we stand up and say no, we're going to raise your taxes, our horizon is limited. That's the reality.

Given what we're hearing on poverty and on groups like the disabled, who are struggling just to get the basics, how can we get a discussion going that will make people willing to support the investments we need to make Canada the country we all believe it has the potential to become?

I'll leave it at that.

**Mr. Bill Moore-Kilgannon:** I think your question is incredibly important. It's certainly a discussion here in Alberta, where the provincial government likes to say it has the lowest tax system in the country. We are the only province that has a flat tax. When you look at the actual numbers, what you'll actually find is that low-income people pay the fourth highest taxes in Canada, in Alberta, because of the flat tax. So it's erroneous to say the provincial government in Alberta can be cutting taxes because of our oil and natural gas wealth. But the distribution of the taxes is obviously not shared equally.

You used the word “investment”, and I think that's exactly the way we need to talk about a commitment to a poverty elimination strategy. I would urge us as well to talk about poverty prevention. When we do so, I think we can easily make the case that these are important investments that benefit the quality of life for absolutely everybody.

The return on investment approach is that whether you look at investments, as I've been talking about, in early childhood education and care, greater access to post-secondary education, and the diversification of our economy, they absolutely need to be crucial parts of how we talk about poverty elimination and support for people with disabilities, who have an incredible amount to offer. I've been hearing that the provincial government is now out of money through the EI fund to support people with disabilities in colleges and technical institutes. Many of those people who are in mid-program are going to be young people with disabilities and are being cut off from the money. So as of January they will not be returning to school.

Those are the stories that we need to tell, so that people understand that these are real investments. When we've done polling, we don't do as the Canadian Taxpayers Federation does and simply ask, “Would you like a tax cut?” Sure, that sounds good to me. But would you like a tax cut if it would mean that your mother in the long-term care system is going to have to pay significantly more? Would you like a tax cut if it's going to mean less access to post-secondary education? Would you like a tax cut if we're not going to

have child care so that your granddaughter is able to get into quality child care so that your daughter is able to go back to school and training?

If you frame it that way, then every time we've done polling, even in Alberta, the numbers are completely different. When the provincial government asks “What are your priorities?”, tax cuts were number 8 or 9 on the list of where they want to see government spending. So we have to talk about priorities and what matters to Canadians in their lives and make sure those investments are being put in place so that at the end of the day we're building a system where people truly have choices that allow them to move forward and benefit from the wealth that we all share.

If I were a politician, which I'm not, that is how I would approach it with my constituents: telling them their dollars are well spent here.

• (0955)

**The Chair:** Bev, did you want to add to that?

**Mrs. Bev Matthiessen:** When a question like that comes up—providing more services with less money and not raising taxes—then we start talking about efficiency and effectiveness and those types of things.

I will tell you that out of all the years I've worked in the disability community, I have never heard anyone say that they want to see anyone with a disability go without services. They would actually pay more in taxes to make sure that does not happen.

I also want to say that in Alberta our income support program, Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped, is a very good program. Between 1992 and 2003, there were hardly any raises; inflation went up over 25%, and our AISH program went up about 6%. People were getting further and further behind, but in the last five years the provincial government has given a raise to people on AISH, and it has helped out considerably.

Sometimes it's those extra supports around it, such as subsidized housing or accessible and adaptable housing—things such as that, and access to education—that can make the difference.

I've given a couple of ideas here. One is what we're calling a Federal Disability Act, something that would be a good thing to do. Another is to work along with our national group, the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, on this national action plan on disabilities.

There are a few other things. A few years ago we were talking about a federal home care program and we had given a lot of recommendations for that, but nothing ever came of it. Our organization has recently done a project on respite care for family caregivers. I'm bringing something up here at the last minute, but this is extremely important, because this project was for unpaid family caregivers looking after family members with disabilities, in their own home. It is a tremendous savings to the health care system, if those people can be supported. I have a full report on this that I'd be more than willing to pass on to you.

So I have made some suggestions about what the federal government could do to help people with disabilities.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Tony, very much.

Go ahead, John.

**Mr. John Kolkman:** I just want to respond very directly to Mr. Martin's question.

Ed Broadbent, someone I think you know, wrote a very interesting opinion article in the *Globe and Mail* on November 24, the 20th anniversary of the Eliminating Child Poverty resolution. One of the things he suggested was that if the federal government were to increase the marginal tax rate on people with individual taxable incomes above \$250,000 per year to 35%, which is exactly what people in the United States pay making that level of income—that's a six percentage point increase, from 29% to 35%—the federal government could generate an additional \$4 billion a year in revenue.

What if the federal government were to decide, with that \$4 billion, that they were going to put it into some key priorities? For example, the Caledon Institute has calculated that child tax benefits could be increased by about 50% above current levels with an additional \$4 billion investment. Perhaps some could be applied to enhancing the disability tax credit that Bev talked about.

I think there is some room to look at raising the marginal tax rates on very wealthy Canadians. In a sense we're non-competitive with the United States, which has a 35% tax rate above \$250,000 in individual taxable income. I think if it were framed in that way, and if those dollars were dedicated to fighting poverty, you might be surprised: there might be more support for that kind of proposal than we think at the current time.

•(1000)

**The Chair:** Thanks, John, and thanks Tony.

I'm going to wrap up.

I have a few questions regarding Alberta's plan, which they just came out with in the last little while. There's a Hamilton round table for poverty, near my riding in southwestern Ontario between Hamilton and St. Catharines. They have had some success, and Vancouver and a few other cities have been talking about it. One of the things they've come up with is the thought process of "no blame". In other words, everyone needs to participate. Sure, there's more the federal government could be doing, and there's more we need to do; we all recognize that. But there's the notion of trying to get businesses involved, and municipal and provincial governments, and all these kinds of things.

My question to you, given what I've heard about Alberta's plan, which seems to talk about what they're going to do over the next number of years, is what your thoughts are on the plan that Alberta has come up with or is talking about trying to implement. They talk about more housing. The number one recommendation, from everywhere we've been bar none, is about housing. It's a critical issue.

My question to the panel is, what are your thoughts concerning the recommendations Alberta has made and where they're going with this?

**Mr. Bill Moore-Kilgannon:** *We Must Do Better* was a report put together by those of us who toured the province and looked at 37

forums. The provincial government currently has a number of initiatives, which are highlighted in our brief. It's not as though nothing is going on in this province to try to address issues of poverty. Most of the issues, however, are focused on poverty alleviation rather than any real vision of poverty prevention or poverty reduction; there is no provincial plan here. We are hoping that community organizations, business groups, and the municipalities will all come together to work with the provincial government, and ultimately the federal government as well, to put a plan in place.

You talked about housing. We specifically didn't get into housing in our presentation here, because we know that other people will be addressing it later in the day. It is a huge issue here. John can talk, though, about how on the one hand the province has put forward a ten-year plan to eliminate homelessness and has then taken money from another fund in that area to fund it, so that there are no net new dollars.

John, you may want to talk about how shuffling money from one side to the other is not a plan.

**Mr. John Kolkman:** Yes. Those of us involved with affordable housing were very pleased that the provincial government adopted a ten-year plan to end homelessness. In some ways, one of the arguments we're making is that it should be extended to perhaps a ten-year plan to end poverty, because homelessness is only one dimension of it. When it comes to providing the financial resources to bring it about, we're already falling seriously behind.

Unfortunately, Alberta appointed a secretariat to study how much it would cost to end homelessness, and the number they came up with is that it would cost \$3.3 billion over 10 years; that's \$330 million a year. When the provincial budget came out last year, however, they only invested \$400 million over three years, so they have already fallen behind there. Then, worse than that, they basically took those dollars out of other housing programs, particularly out of the rent subsidy program. That's one of the reasons the wait list for subsidized housing has gone up so dramatically: there are just no additional dollars. They ran out of dollars about four months into the budget year.

So it's a good commitment that the Alberta government has made, but we are calling upon them to fund the commitment appropriately; otherwise we're just not going to be able to achieve that worthy objective of ending homelessness. I guess that's my answer.

•(1005)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Bev, I'm going to give you the last word.

**Mrs. Bev Matthiessen:** Thank you for that.

Not everything has to cost money. If we work on universal design and build buildings that are accessible to people with disabilities, then people can go to school, can get a job, and can have a decent place to live.

The other thing I'd like to say is that if you ask a person with a disability, often they'll say that the greatest barriers are attitudinal barriers. The fellow I was talking to yesterday is trying to move from his place, where he's paying \$850 a month for rent, but everybody at every place he goes to where it's a decent amount per month, when they learn he's on our income support program, won't have anything to do with him. Many people will tell you that attitudinal barriers are really a big thing that holds people with disabilities back.

There are programs that can help educate the community about the abilities of people with disabilities. That's my last word. Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Just in conclusion....

Yes?

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Chair, just as a suggestion, we have one witness in the next meeting, as I understand it, and we have three very good witnesses here. I'm wondering whether there's any chance we could consider extending for another quick round of questions with these witnesses, if it were the wish of the panel. I'm not sure who's here for the next panel.

**The Chair:** Certainly, if it's all right with the panel.... I'll limit it to a couple of questions. We're going to have a couple of walk-ins as well, so there will be more.

But by all means, if it's all right with the ladies and gentlemen at the table, we could certainly....

Why don't we go with five minutes each?

**Mr. Michael Savage:** I just need a couple of minutes. It should be enough.

**The Chair:** Sure. Unless you say something controversial, then I'll have to rebut it.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** No, I'm done with that.

Listen, I appreciate the work all three of you do in this community. John, you were making an excellent point about refundable tax credits, the child tax benefit and the national child benefit. You mentioned the disability tax credit, which, as a start, should be made fully refundable. You spoke about the UCCB. Most of the people we've met with, when they talk about the universal child care benefit, suggest eliminating the UCCB and redirecting the funds to enhance the means-tested child benefits or to create child care spaces. A lot of people, particularly in the child care community, are telling us to get rid of it or fold it into the child tax benefit. That wasn't what you were saying. You were saying it should be retained and made non-taxable.

**Mr. John Kolkman:** That's correct.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** So if I have a child one to six, I would get the \$100 a month and I wouldn't pay tax on it?

**Mr. John Kolkman:** That's correct.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** I have a little trouble with that. I'm going to see if there's general agreement on it. Everything else you said, I agree with. That's the one thing that makes me scratch my head a bit.

**Mr. John Kolkman:** I'm trying to come up with a solution that will gain all-party support. We have to recognize that high-income young people with children under the age of six are going to be a

small percentage of the population. Perhaps some people with inherited wealth will be in that category, but I suspect it's going to be very few. Since the federal Conservatives have come to power, they've extended two of their tweekings. They introduced a \$300-per-family non-refundable tax credit that's available to anyone who pays taxes. That's why I said this was a very non-progressive benefit. You have to pay tax to get up to \$300, and to get your full \$300, you have to pay a significant amount of federal income tax. So that's a very regressive tax. We're suggesting that the up-to-\$300 non-refundable credit be eliminated and the \$1.5 billion in savings applied to the basic benefit, where there is a phase-out for higher-income Canadians.

The universal child care benefit has very little to do with child care and nothing to do with building a child care system. It is simply another way to support families with children. You have to ask yourself, is it really that bad a benefit? Parents of very young children tend to be younger parents, just getting started in careers, and they incur more costs for child care than parents of school-aged children do, simply because their kids aren't in school yet. If you recall, there was a supplement for children under seven that was abolished when the UCCB was brought in. Is it so bad to retain it? If you're going to have anything that's universal, it should be benefits that go to younger parents of preschool children. The odd young family that has inherited wealth maybe doesn't need it, but that's such a small percentage of parents that we don't think it's worth removing the universality from the benefit.

I talked about the poverty wall dimension. There's nothing wrong with certain benefits being universal. If we weight things too heavily to phasing things out as income rises, we can create high marginal tax rates for low-income families. This actually discourages them from earning additional income, because they're going to lose benefits, including child tax benefits, as their income goes up. So, yes, this is our proposal. I'm looking forward to the committee's assessment of it when it becomes available in both official languages. We've put a specific proposal forward, and we'd be glad to continue the dialogue on it.

● (1010)

**The Chair:** That's all the time you have.

Bill, did you have a quick response?

**Mr. Bill Moore-Kilgannon:** I just think we need to be very prudent with the dollars we have. The existing child tax benefit program I think is probably a lot less costly to administer. Adding to that, as John has suggested, clearly reduces poverty and supports families. And the child tax benefit program actually extends quite high into mid-range family incomes, so getting broad public middle-class support for this I think is quite feasible to do.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** It's graduated—

**Mr. Bill Moore-Kilgannon:** It's graduated, yes.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** —unlike the new CCP, if it was \$100 untaxed.

**Mr. Bill Moore-Kilgannon:** Exactly. And I agree with John and others that if the true intention is to build quality child care in this province, then it's misnamed, shall we say. I'd rather see that money used more effectively, without the additional administrative costs the federal government is obviously paying to administer a completely separate cheque.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'm going to turn it over to Mr. Lessard now for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** One of the measures that has been proven, based on Quebec's experience, is the universal child care program. Progress has also been made with respect to housing and employability, especially among women and people with disabilities. Quebec's day care system has been around for 30 years now. In its first five years, we saw family poverty drop by 4%, which is huge. The proportion of people below the poverty line went from around 17% to approximately 14%. So these measures have been proven.

And there is somewhat of a similar expectation elsewhere. In order to be successful, Quebec had to take charge of its own day care system. Since then, we have seen that provinces, especially groups like yours, expect the federal government to be forthcoming with measures, which is not at all the case. My questions are perhaps very naive.

Would it not be better to ask for that power to be transferred to the province and for you to make every effort to compel the Alberta government to implement that system? You would have just one door to knock on, instead of two.

•(1015)

**Mr. Bill Moore-Kilgannon:** To my mind, it is important for us to have the federal government involved in day care, especially when we see that the provincial government is receiving federal money to create new day care spots and is not investing it. Instead, it is putting that money towards other budgets. So it is important to work with the federal government, to ask it to reach an agreement with the provinces to really invest in a day care system and to check every year that the money was invested properly.

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** I will play the devil's advocate a bit here. As we speak, neither of them is taking any action. The one who takes action transfers the money, since it is an area under provincial jurisdiction. Do you want the responsibility for a day care system to fall solely on the federal government?

**Mr. Bill Moore-Kilgannon:** No.

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** If that is not what you want—and I am still being devil's advocate here—you are going to end up in the same situation. I am not telling you to ask the federal government to completely take over this responsibility. But would it not be more appropriate to ask the federal government to transfer the amounts, and the provincial government to invest them where they should go?

**Mr. Bill Moore-Kilgannon:** Yes, but it is important for both to work together. We live in a society where the levels of government each have their responsibilities. There are other social programs where two levels of government have a partnership. In Alberta, however, the money from the federal government is not being invested properly, and that creates political problems.

I understand perfectly what is happening in Quebec. You made the decision to invest properly in a universal day care system. In Alberta, we invest a lot of money in a private system. It is very obvious that companies' profits are increasing, rather than the number of day care spots or the quality of the system.

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** You may find my comments frustrating, but sometimes, things can be seen in a different light.

The same goes for the employability of persons with disabilities. An organization named SPHERE-Québec helps the government with its decisions to ensure accessibility and job retention. When they were able to obtain those amounts, it led to more—and it is not perfect—people with disabilities in the workforce.

I am going to ask you a question that may be a bit provocative. Is it not a cop-out to ask the federal government to continue? You can continue to blame the provincial government for putting money in the Treasury instead of fighting to make sure it goes to the right place.

That is the sort of discussion we will have amongst ourselves. So it is important to hear your point of view.

•(1020)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** That's all the time we have, but Bev, I want you to answer the question, and then we'll move on.

**Mrs. Bev Matthiessen:** If I get the gist of it, what we're talking about is money that's transferred federally to the province. The province doesn't always spend it the way the federal government would like to see it spent or with the intention of the federal government in placing that money here in Alberta. That's why Bill keeps saying that the province and the federal government need to keep working together to come up with some kind of plan so that the money is spent where the federal government would prefer it to be spent. I think if the federal government is going to give money to the province, it should have strings attached to it so that the money is spent where the money should be spent.

Years ago we used to have that. In fact, when I first started working in this field we could deal directly with the federal government. We had programs that came directly from the federal government. I know that one time, money was given federally to the province for health care, and that actually went into lowering taxes.

What more can I say?

**The Chair:** I'm not sure Mr. Lessard would like the answer about strings being attached, but that's a good answer anyway.

I'm going to pass it along to Mr. Martin for the last round of five minutes.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** I just want to get back to the issue I was speaking about a few minutes ago, about the funding and how we get to a debate or a discussion on taxation. Certainly, there are those out there who will tell you—and I'm one who believes it—that Canada has the money. It's not a lack of money. It's there; we just distribute it in different ways.

For example, in the last federal election—if you were listening, as I was, to the leaders' debate—the Prime Minister said the government was rolling out a \$250 billion tax relief package. That's money going back to mostly big corporations in this country who make the claim that if they don't get the tax relief, the investment won't happen. We've seen how effective that was with the recession that happened, right? That's my view, anyway.

The CCPA suggests that the problem is ideological. It's political. It's this sense that there are some in the country who believe that if we just leave it to the private sector and the economy gets better, all the boats will get lifted. We've seen in the last few years what has happened. The studies that have been done are showing greater inequality in the country.

We've turned over investment in housing. We used to have a very aggressive affordable housing strategy in the 1980s and the early 1990s. I saw in my own community several wonderful not-for-profit co-op and other housing units built for people, and they're still doing the job. We believed that if we got the government out there, the private sector would move in and build those houses anyway. That hasn't happened either, and that's obvious now. We certainly heard that in spades up in the northern part of the country yesterday and the day before.

Again, my question to you is that Alberta is often looked at as the epicentre of right-wing thinking, where the ideology is “leave it to the private sector and everything will be well and good and we will prosper”.

I just want some thoughts from you. We're in Alberta today, and I want to hear what you think about that.

**Mr. John Kolkman:** Thanks for the question.

Certainly, economic recovery will help. There's no question that, whether it's provincial or federal, a stronger economy generates more tax revenues. I think that as we get through the worst of the recession, federal revenues will begin to recover.

I think what's a bit unfortunate, however—and you've been alluding to it—is that we've been involved, certainly in North America, in a little bit of a race to the bottom in terms of who can cut

taxes the most. I do think we need to look seriously at that. I think we have a much better potential in Canada to get out of our deficit problem more readily than south of the border. I already mentioned the marginal tax rates on very wealthy families and individuals being significantly higher in the U.S. than they are in Canada. Similarly, if you look at corporate tax rates, for example, we've been cutting those rates in Canada a bit below what they are currently in the U.S.

In my view, we shouldn't be looking to cut taxes more. If anything, those who can afford to pay more should perhaps be called upon to do so, including very wealthy Canadians and perhaps larger, profitable corporations, as corporate tax. Or at least let's not cut corporate taxes any further. That by itself is going to give the federal government additional resources it can really use on priority programs.

I don't think there should be a greater priority than trying to reduce and eventually eliminate poverty. If that's where the dollars are applied, I personally think Canadians would be supportive of that. That's my view.

• (1025)

**Mr. Bill Moore-Kilgannon:** To use the example of child care again, in relation to the role of business and all of this, it's important to look at other jurisdictions around the world that are investing in child care. They've seen that a lot of the dollars actually end up going to increased profits for the business sector. They've certainly seen that in Australia, where ABC Learning Centres started in 1990 and grew to have 25% of all child care spaces in the country. When that corporation collapsed last year—they were operating in 11 countries around the world, including here in Alberta, where they had established 11 centres—the Australian government had to step in with millions of dollars just to keep those child care centres open for the next couple of months. They were wrapped up in increasing their real estate profits—where the real money is in child care; it's not so much in the care of children but in the increased value of the buildings they own.

I think Canadians want to see their tax dollars spent very well and efficiently, but you need to put in place mechanisms to make sure what you're investing in is not increased profits for certain corporations but delivery of quality services. Any poverty elimination strategy and plan needs to have the mechanisms in place to make sure those dollars are actually going to what they're said to be going to, whether that money is transferred via the province or invested directly in certain programs. There need to be accountability mechanisms to track year over year if it's achieving the goals and if the money is actually being spent on what it's said to be spent on.

**The Chair:** I'm going to try to give you the last word again, Bev. We'll try one more time. The last word goes to you.

**Mrs. Bev Matthiessen:** I think people with disabilities probably get left out more when it's left to the private sector, because there has to be a dollar value there, as there always has to be.

To give you an example, in the Alberta building code, when you build a hotel, you don't have to have accessible rooms. If you are a person with a disability and you want to stay in a hotel, maybe this hotel has one room or two rooms that are accessible. They don't see a value in having people with disabilities stay there. The hotels are full anyway, so why build accessible rooms?

It's the same with child care spots. How many of those are actually accessible to kids with disabilities? I don't think a lot of them probably are.

When the province or the federal government gives money for building any kind of infrastructure, all of that infrastructure has to be accessible to people with disabilities.

I get notices from public affairs here saying that the province is giving money to build something in some small town. And then they say, right under that, that they're going to have special housing over there for people with disabilities. It shouldn't be that way. All that money should be for accessible buildings so that we don't have a situation where some spots are for people with disabilities and the rest aren't. All government money should be put into accessible services for people with disabilities.

I've gone a little beyond answering about the private sector, but I think that's pretty much our experience: people with disabilities kind of get left behind.

• (1030)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Once again, I want to thank the witnesses for being here today. We realize that you men and women are on the front lines making a difference every day. As I said, if we can take some recommendations back through our committee to the government, that is the intent of what our study is all about.

Thank you, once again, for taking time to be here.

With that, I'll suspend the meeting for half an hour.

• \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

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• (1100)

**The Chair:** Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), our study on the federal contribution to reducing poverty in Canada will continue.

We were just suspended for an hour. I appreciate your patience as we told you 11, then 10, then 11. It is 11, so we're going to get started. I want to thank you for taking time out of your schedule.

I think you're already aware—you've been talking to some—that we've been studying this issue for well over a year, closer to two years. We have to deal with legislation as it comes up, so that's why it hasn't been directly. We've been out east, we've been out west, we've been north, and now we're just finishing off today in Edmonton, tomorrow Winnipeg.

We appreciate the recommendations you're going to give us as a committee, that we're going to put in the report to send back to the government to suggest some of the things we can look at doing a better job on. That's why you're here today, to talk about your own experiences and any recommendations you may have for us. I

apologize again for the delay, but thanks for being patient and for being with us.

I'm going to turn the floor over—I'm assuming both of you will be able to answer questions, and maybe one of you is presenting. Are you both presenting?

You're going to present, Dave? Welcome, sir, and Wendy. We're going to give you the floor, so it's all yours.

**Mr. Dave Ward (Director, Aboriginal Relations, Homeward Trust Edmonton):** Fantastic. Thank you.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen of the committee. Thank you for inviting us to speak today on this very important topic.

This morning I would like to talk to you a bit about Homeward Trust, the cost of homelessness, the prevention of homelessness, and make some recommendations to the committee.

Homeward Trust Edmonton is a non-profit community-based organization that provides leadership and resources towards the goal of ending homelessness in Edmonton. Our primary role is to coordinate a response to homelessness in Edmonton by working together with local agencies and all orders of government.

We work to fulfill our mission by providing leadership on housing and strategic and community planning. To date, we have invested in 78 capital projects, totalling 1,700 units, delivering \$17 million to support projects and \$70 million in capital projects.

Homeward Trust provides leadership in creating the Edmonton Community Plan on Housing and Support Services. It is a comprehensive road map to addressing homelessness and support services in Edmonton. The plan outlines the estimated funding requirements of 3,750 additional housing units: \$401.6 million in capital costs, and \$567.5 million in operating costs.

The entire community, including private, for-profit and non-profit housing providers, community agencies, and all three orders of government will have to work together to contribute towards making the recommended solutions a reality. Ending homelessness is a complex challenge and there is no single solution. Preventing homelessness requires organized cross-governmental cooperation.

In Alberta there is a dedicated focus and desire to end homelessness. Edmonton's mayor, Stephen Mandel, in February of this year, created Edmonton's 10-year plan to end homelessness and formed the Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness. As well, the Government of Alberta created the Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, which developed its own 10-year provincial plan, a plan for Alberta to end homelessness in 10 years.

Both plans adopted a Housing First model and enthusiastically support the creation of more accessible social housing units. As a result, we here in Edmonton have taken a fundamental shift in addressing homelessness. By adopting the Housing First strategy, we have modernized the way in which homelessness is approached in Edmonton. We believe there should be more opportunity for people at risk of homelessness to avoid it altogether with the creation of more affordable social housing units. For those who do become homeless, there should be more opportunity to find settled homes and support, which is the backbone of the housing first philosophy.

We believe that homelessness has no place in a sustainable community. Regrettably, ending homelessness won't bring an end to poverty among Canadians, but ending poverty will go a long way to ending homelessness in Canada. That is why we support the standing committee's goal of ending poverty in Canada. Eliminating poverty directly addresses the root causes of homelessness.

Those who are homeless have many challenges and issues, including addictions, mental health issues, and trauma, and there is no one story that brought them to homelessness. But what they do all have in common is poverty. It is the thread that runs through every story. Homelessness, like poverty, takes a huge toll on our citizens and our community. They are indeed brothers of a different father. While we can and do successfully address their other issues through assertive support, we have no certainty regarding their future ability to be financially self-sufficient. Similarly, the at-risk population is growing, and for the most they don't have complex and concurrent issues, but their potential exposure to homelessness and the consequences of entering the system of services serving the homeless population have a very detrimental impact mentally and emotionally.

Approximately 3,100 individuals are homeless on any given night in the city of Edmonton, meaning that they are living on the street or in temporary shelter. At a recent Homeless Connect event, we had 1,100 individuals visit the event looking for free service and housing supports.

● (1105)

The moral and social costs of homelessness are apparent and on the streets and in shelters. The financial costs are less so. But chronically homeless citizens consume enormous public resources. One estimate suggests homelessness costs taxpayers \$4.5 billion to \$6 billion every year for all the 150,000 homeless Canadians.

We know that in Edmonton it costs \$100,000 a year to keep an individual homeless. We know that an average Edmontonian spends nine days in hospital per year. The average stay for an individual experiencing homelessness is 66 days. We know that one in five calls to emergency vehicles come from a homeless individual. Homelessness causes a huge strain on both our medical and justice systems. Current research indicates that we are able to house an individual and provide them with all necessary supports for up to one year for under \$35,000, a considerable savings. In Edmonton, we know there currently is a 4,000-person waiting list for social housing.

In summary, we look to all three orders of government to provide leadership and set out new approaches to tackle the personal and social causes of homelessness, alongside structural issues like social

housing supply. To stress the point again, ending poverty will go a long way in ending homelessness in Canada.

Our first recommendation, then, to the committee is to increase the number of affordable housing units available to Canadians, as is recommended both in the City of Edmonton and the Province of Alberta's 10-year plans to end homelessness. That's strategy number 11 in the plan for Alberta and goals number one and two in this municipal plan.

Our second recommendation focuses on reducing poverty to help prevent homelessness. Through tax deductions and program assistance such as homelessness and eviction prevention funds, this recommendation is supported in the City of Edmonton and province's 10-year plans. That's strategy number 16 for the province and goal number four for the municipal government.

In conclusion, we would like to see the government ensure an adequate supply of permanent, affordable housing options with appropriate supports for these Canadians who are currently homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. We would also ask that the government put poverty and homelessness best practices prevention strategies into immediate action.

That concludes our presentation component.

I'd also like to emphasize something that has generated quite a fundamental shift: not only the adoption of the Housing First philosophy but the inclusion of a population that is highly impacted by this issue. In Edmonton, out of the 3,100 individuals who were counted in the point-in-time count, approximately 40% were of aboriginal descent. In the last three Homeless Connect events that we helped to coordinate, approximately 40% to 50% of that population were of aboriginal descent.

Homeward Trust has developed a very unique governance structure. We have two nominating committees. There's an aboriginal nominating committee and then a non-aboriginal nominating committee. They're populated by our stakeholders. Individuals in the community who are focused on this issue have an opportunity to apply and then go through an interview process. We've gone through our first cycle of populating our board through this mechanism.

As an aboriginal person, a first nation person from northern Alberta, I have gone through and witnessed families and friends struggling with all of these types of issues. In an urban context, having aboriginal people participate at the level of a decision-making role and having that balance with individuals I think is something that's really important and something that I hope the committee can consider for other communities.

Thank you.

● (1110)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're going to start with Mr. Lessard. If you need the French translation, you'll need those headsets.



Just quickly about Homeward Trust again, I know you mentioned it in your opening remarks, but do you guys help facilitate people finding places? Do you have a bank of residences that you operate? What exactly...?

**Mr. Dave Ward:** We manage the resources for three orders of government, so homeless prevention strategy resources for the federal government and the provincial government. We are the funding body for the agencies that are delivering the services. We fund the capital projects.

In terms of program delivery, we don't do the program delivery. That's the front-line agencies.

**The Chair:** You redirect the money to projects for actual new housing then. So when the provincial government or the city talks about this 10-year plan, your organization will be helping to facilitate the building and delivery of those units.

**Mr. Dave Ward:** With the municipal plan, we're currently working on finalizing the MOU with the homeless commission, and that will likely charge us with being the management body for the 10-year plan. It has been adopted by our board and it complements the community plan we have developed over the last five years.

**The Chair:** Great. There may be more questions; I just wanted to clarify that for members of Parliament.

We will start with Mr. Lessard, for seven minutes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank our witnesses for their presentations, this morning. I know that we are going to focus on the issue of housing, in particular.

I am not sure whether the benchmarks are still the same, but when the poverty reduction strategy was implemented in 1989 and later, during the various levels of debate, the vacancy rate used as the benchmark for determining the need for so-called affordable housing was 3%.

In some of the cities we have visited and according to some of the witnesses we have heard from, we are seeing that the number is 2.4%. So close to 3%. Are vacant housing units units that are affordable or units that need renovations? The 2.4% rate is not ideal, but it is still interesting.

[English]

**Mr. Dave Ward:** Thank you for the question.

In Edmonton we've had the opportunity to connect in terms of the Housing First philosophy. One of the major pillars within that philosophy is the landlord. We've been working quite extensively, building relationships with key landlords and demonstrating the economic returns on participating in a Housing First type of program.

The benefits of that kind of programming, relationship-building, have proven to us that there are some units and issues as far as renovations are concerned, but the opportunity to help homeless individuals to be housed, thus educating the private sector and sharing the story about how this program works...I think we've started to bear some of the fruits of that labour. Any individual who

comes through the program has quite an extensive choice about what kinds of units they might want to reside in.

• (1115)

**Ms. Wendy Myshak (Manager, Community Initiatives, Homeward Trust Edmonton):** I want to speak a bit about the vacancy rate. Alberta is a bit of an odd dog in Canada because of our boom in the last couple of years. There was a point, in 2008, where our vacancy rate was below 1%. It was very difficult to find an apartment, and if one was available it was very expensive. I think CMHC said a one-bedroom was anywhere from \$850 to \$1,000 a month. That was generally in the outlying areas, not in the core, where a lot of migrants and other people wish to live. It was very difficult for them to find any sort of housing at all.

I think that speaks directly to poverty and not so much to homelessness, but certainly the vacancy rate did a lot to increase our number of homeless individuals in the last year.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** A previous witness told us about the situation of persons with disabilities. Does your social housing development strategy include measures specifically for people with disabilities so as to favour adaptable housing?

[English]

**Ms. Wendy Myshak:** Yes, we do fund several projects. A recent one is for a society called the Excel Society, and it was built specifically for people with disabilities. We do address that issue.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** About that, have you set percentage targets? We know that the percentage of people with disabilities is 10%, but not all of them have a physical disability.

As to the percentage of people with a physical disability, do you have any targets in terms of the number of housing units?

[English]

**Ms. Wendy Myshak:** It hasn't been a priority. This EICHS society is built specifically for people with physical disabilities. It's wheelchair accessible, no stairs, and things of that nature. We do have different units available for people with different types of disabilities. It is something we address.

In our particular population, significant numbers of homeless individuals are elderly senior people and youth. We have been focusing a lot on building units specifically with that group in mind.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** You say that the city of Edmonton, thanks to its mayor, and Alberta have devised a modern strategy. I am not sure whether you meant to use that word or not. When we hear "modern", we think new measures that are adapted to today's reality.

Could you describe those new measures adapted to today's reality?

[English]

**Mr. Dave Ward:** For the first time, from what I recall, the Province of Alberta has invested \$32 million in support services. That has provided an opportunity for us to support the Housing First philosophy. Out of those resources here in Edmonton we were able to fund nine different teams that are working in the Parkland area and the River Valley, engaging homeless people and getting them into the program.

In terms of modernizing our approach, in the past I think in the approach to homelessness, although the coordinated effort and intention of agencies was to try to provide and ultimately get homeless people into permanent housing, the resources and the staff to actually support that process through to the end and to provide the kind of guidance and linkage to the community haven't been there. In our Housing First philosophy there are three major pillars: the client, the landlord, and the community.

Statistically one of the things we've referenced—and you can use the aboriginal community as an example—is the aboriginal population, in terms of the 40% that are homeless. It's incumbent upon us, our partners in the community, and the aboriginal community to ensure that individuals who come to this program, and programs like it, are given opportunities to socialize and connect to their community and feel that they belong, and feel not that their community is solely at a shelter or in an agency, but that their community is broader than that.

● (1120)

**The Chair:** Wendy, you can answer that, and then we're going to move on.

**Ms. Wendy Myshak:** I want to speak briefly on the modernizing of the philosophy.

Prior to the last, I would say, five years in North America, the idea has always been to take a homeless individual, who may or may not have problems with addiction or mental health, go through transitional housing or some other methods to get them free of their addictions, get them balanced on their medicine, and then try to get them a home.

What we found, and what they found in other cities such as New York and Portland and Toronto, is that in order to get someone balanced and stable, they really need to have a home first. That's why it's called Housing First. The first thing we do is get people into a house, and then we deal with their addictions, their mental health issues, and things like that. It's a complete flip-flop of the old philosophy, which was, "We're not going to help you; we're not going to put you in a house because we don't think you're ready. You have an addiction problem, you have this, you have that. You don't deserve a home."

We use the term "modernizing", but we've really flipped it on its head: "We're going to put you in a house." And it's been very successful. I believe in the city of Toronto in the past three and a half years they have almost an 89% success rate. You probably heard this when you were down east, but 89% of the people that they put in housing and they do support, in a year, are still in their housing situation.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I think Mr. Martin will probably agree. We've heard a lot about the thought that if people don't have housing, it's very hard to combat their addictions, because they have no place to go, no sense of stability, and all those things. So it would seem, from some of the testimony we've been hearing, that it does make more sense to be looking at that kind of model.

Mr. Martin, the floor is yours for seven minutes.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** Thank you.

You've been a breath of fresh air here this morning in terms of some of what we've been hearing across the country. You've identified the real challenge that is out there. Some of what you're doing, the success you're having, and the approach you're taking is very positive I think, and we can certainly all learn from it.

Just the last comment about not necessarily looking at a person and defining them by their addiction or their affliction but looking at them as a human being who first of all needs a place to call home, and then from there we can build on other things, I think that's spectacular. To put in place the support programs that are necessary is really great too.

My first experience of poverty in Alberta was quite a shock. I showed up in Calgary about two years ago in February and found—you said 3,100 here—there were at that time, before the recession, 3,500 to 4,000 sleeping rough in the streets of Calgary. Dean, Mike, and I visited the big shelter there and it was quite an experience, but we saw the effort that was being made to try to get some of those folks in out of the cold, and then get them into some programming and move them on.

But some of what you're doing here in front of that major challenge, I guess, is kind of interesting and unique, not expected. Alberta back then and for quite some time has been the mecca that everybody moved to for the new wealth and the new jobs. I remember travelling home for Christmas in the middle of winter and they had actually closed the highway down, but I was young and foolish and thought I could never get hurt, so I went through anyway. There was another guy on the road just a little bit farther ahead, hitchhiking, and I picked him up. He was heading for Alberta. He thought if he could get there the day after New Year's, that of everybody who had gone home, some wouldn't come back, and there would be jobs.

What I discovered in the shelter in Calgary was a lot of those young people who came to get jobs. Some of them got jobs—not all of them did—but they couldn't find a place to live, as you said, because either it was not there or it was too expensive or whatever. They were sleeping on the same mats on the floors as the addicted folks and the people suffering from mental illness and a whole bunch of other issues. It was quite disturbing that that was how we were dealing with human beings who have inherent value in them and who we need to be respecting and honouring.

It's good to hear as well that the provincial government is spending some money—\$30 million, I think you said. Maybe you could talk a bit about the federal role and any expected federal role. What could you tell us that would be helpful in terms of—that's the role of this committee—what the federal role should be in a national anti-poverty strategy? And should there be a national anti-poverty strategy in the first place?

• (1125)

**Ms. Wendy Myshak:** Just to speak first to your comment on poverty, as Dave mentioned in our introduction, if you could reduce or eliminate poverty in Canada, you would go a long, long way to ending homelessness.

I don't want to just spew stats, but the number of individuals who we would categorize as chronically homeless is I think anywhere from 15% to 20%. So 20% or 15% of 3,100 is quite a reduction in the number of people who would be on the streets.

In Alberta specifically, a lot of our homeless individuals are working, and it's not a question of their being lazy or addicted or whatever. It's just that they cannot find an affordable place to live. That's very true of young people who have come from the east coast to try to find work. Last year we had 50,000 temporary foreign workers come to the province. We do have a lot of migrants who come also. For that entire population, the ones who do end up on the street, which is a considerable number, do so because of poverty. It is because the wage they're earning is minimum wage, and there's no way they can afford even a one-bedroom or a studio apartment on minimum wage.

So if you could eliminate poverty, you would go a long, long way to making our job of eliminating homelessness a lot easier.

I don't remember your other question.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** It was about the federal role.

**Ms. Wendy Myshak:** Right.

We just had a National Housing Day breakfast last week, hosted by CMHC, and they did speak a little bit about unaffordable housing. That's one place where the federal government could really take a leadership role. As you were saying in a previous session, there's just not affordable housing in Alberta. As we were saying, in Edmonton there are 4,000 people waiting for housing, and that's not including, for the most part, the people who are currently on the street and people who are couch surfing, the "hidden homeless". If the federal government could provide more units, good units, places where people want to live in neighbourhoods where they want to live, that would go a very long way to helping the problem, at least in Edmonton and Calgary.

**Mr. Dave Ward:** Just to add a little bit to that, I'll reference strategy number 12 of the provincial plan:

There may also be ways in which the federal government and municipal governments could encourage landlords and developers to create additional housing options.

One of the additional references at the bottom is:

The federal government could also play a role in encouraging greater availability of housing options. Its most effective tool is the *Income Tax Act*, which could be used to provide tax incentives to developers and landlords.

In terms of our relationship with the homelessness partnering strategy, we manage those resources here in Edmonton. I've heard from previous board members from the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund and the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee that the work and the support of the HPS department was essential to get us to a place where we could actually start to have these kinds of coordinated efforts at a provincial level and a municipal level. There's been a lot of good work, and based on those relationships, I think there's opportunity to advance on that good work and create some other positive solutions.

• (1130)

**Mr. Tony Martin:** I'll just ask another question.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** I just want to touch on a couple of things, one thing that you previously said and one from just now, on being creative in the way we respond and some of the logjams, the roadblocks. I was in Victoria when I went to Calgary and back, and in Victoria, another beautiful city where you would not for a second imagine that there would be people sleeping on the streets, there were just hundreds of them. They couldn't open up church basements fast enough to take them in during the winter. The really troubling reality there was the number of disabled people living rough. It was startling, and shocking, and depressing all at once.

In Victoria, we had a forum and we had co-op housing folks come, and they had the plans, they had the money, but they couldn't get the land because it was too expensive. They made a suggestion then that we look at the whole taxation regime and see how we might make it more lucrative for people who have land and are sitting on it and they don't want to sell it because of the impact on them regarding taxation. At that time, Denise Savoie, who was our member there, actually brought back to the House and to our caucus some suggestions.

It goes back to the question I asked earlier today: how do we get a discussion started on taxation such that we could reorganize it in a way that benefits not only those who work hard and generate the wealth and deserve a good return on that, but also those at the bottom end, who also participate in meaningful ways, but maybe not quite so valued? How do we rearrange our taxation system so that this type of thing could be done?

Do you have anything further on that?

I think that recommendation is important. Where did we hear that? Somebody made a recommendation in Vancouver where they talked about this notion of making it more financially attractive for developers, for example, to do affordable housing, because they're not doing it.

**Ms. Wendy Myshak:** One option they use in Great Britain that has been successful there, and in Australia is public-private partnerships, which is exactly what you're talking about. Developers are encouraged to either give a discount on their building or keep the building and lease it to the government, or what have you, or give land at a reduced tax rate or tax cut or tax benefit. That program has been very successful in Great Britain and in Australia. That's something to consider.

**Mr. Dave Ward:** Let me add something that I think we referenced in our speaking notes: the cross-governmental discussion and the opportunity there to speak with the province and the city on that shared issue. I know the group you'll be dealing with this afternoon, ECOHH, has also experienced some challenges in terms of some provincial and municipal tax issues.

**The Chair:** Thank you. We're now going to move over to Ms. Cadman for the last round.

The floor is yours.

**Ms. Dona Cadman (Surrey North, CPC):** Thank you for coming.

Can you tell me what the average age is of the homeless on the street?

**Ms. Wendy Myshak:** We have an average age, but the average, if you want to put a face to homelessness in Edmonton, would be single men between 25 and 55.

**Ms. Dona Cadman:** Wow.

This is for Dave. I think we agree that there should be a national housing strategy. Do you think there should be a separate housing strategy for first nations people living off reserve?

**Mr. Dave Ward:** Thank you for that question, Dona.

I have experienced the politics of the on-reserve experience and have had the opportunity to work here in Edmonton to help develop, through the urban aboriginal strategy, which the federal government operates, programs through the federal interlocutor. The pre-existing organization, the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund, managed the urban aboriginal strategy. I was fortunate enough to be the urban aboriginal community coordinator for them.

We worked hard to try to create an entity, and the focus of that entity—at least, one of the goals I had—was to deal with inter-governmentalism. For first nations people in Edmonton, it's very difficult to determine with whom, among the orders of government, to have the conversation about addressing the needs of the community members here. Obviously some first nations communities work very hard to ensure that their off-reserve urban members' needs are addressed and represented. But the vast majority place the major focus on their on-reserve issues.

If there is a strategy for the urban population, I have two recommendations.

To split the limited resources when addressing homelessness could be a challenge. In the homelessness partnering strategy in Vancouver they've attempted to do that: there's an aboriginal component to the HPS resources. I think there's an organization called Luma that has been established for the aboriginal community. The resources offered to that organization are limited in scope, and the ability to have a larger impact is also limited. I don't see any other governance model like Homeward Trust Edmonton across Canada. I think it's an opportunity for us to analyze how we give urban aboriginal people an opportunity to be part of the discussion, to be part of the decision-making body.

We have a nominating committee, which I talked about earlier. I've had discussions with our executive director Susan McGee about

this, and I don't think we could have possibly picked through any process of appointment to that board a more dynamic group of individuals of passion to help us end homelessness. I would encourage some understanding and examination of governance models like ours. From what I have been able to research so far, there is no other governance model that is inclusive of that population to the degree that we are, without having a political obligation to the direct appointments.

I think that urban population needs a voice in some form, but I don't necessarily believe we need to create another political voice for it.

What do I consider myself first in this country? Am I a first nations person or a Canadian? I'm by far a Canadian before I'm a first nations person, and to see a governance model like this exist in our country demonstrates to me that this has been validated, and I hope and encourage other sectors to consider this kind of engagement to that population, should they be impacted as extensively as the aboriginal community is impacted by homelessness.

• (1135)

**Ms. Dona Cadman:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** I want to thank the guests for being here.

Did we have any other questions?

Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** If we have time, Mr. Chair, could we do another quick round, provided that everyone agrees?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Sure. Yes, we've kept you. You're okay with that?

**Mr. Dave Ward:** Absolutely.

**The Chair:** We're going to finish with you, Mr. Lessard. You ask whatever questions you want, and then we'll call it after you're done.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** That's nice. I will try to keep my questions brief.

You said you had an aboriginal committee and a non-aboriginal committee. Do they communicate with one another so they can each benefit from the other's work?

[*English*]

**Mr. Dave Ward:** I need to clarify that a little.

We have two nominating committees, one for aboriginal and one for non-aboriginal. The individuals who are recommended through that process populate our board. So out of the nine seats on our board, five are appointed through the non-aboriginal committee process and four are appointed through the aboriginal. So, collectively, our board is made up of the five and the four, to make up the nine. They work as a collective unit to help us end homelessness. So, absolutely, the sharing of capacity-building opportunities, of community understanding, is also something that's an offshoot benefit.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Good, thank you. That makes it clearer.

When Ms. Cadman asked you about the average age of homeless people, you said that for men, it was 25 to 35. I would think there are also women who are homeless, just like in Montreal—since the proportions are similar in both cities. If so, what is the percentage of women who are homeless?

• (1140)

[*English*]

**Ms. Wendy Myshak:** To clarify, 25 and 55, not 35. It's a much smaller percentage of women: 30% women, roughly.

It's interesting you brought that up, because women become homeless for a very different reason than men do. Usually, it has to do with domestic violence. They can't afford a place to go once they try to leave their domestic violence situation. Again, poverty, and it does impact single mothers and women a lot more than men, because, especially in Alberta.... Men have an opportunity to work in construction or in the oil fields, and they can make a fairly decent wage, whereas women in Alberta, if they're not educated, are usually forced to work for minimum wage, which I'm sure is true across the country. Because it is so pricey here, it is a very difficult situation for women in Edmonton.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** One last question.

First, I can see that you seem to be very confident in the strategy that Edmonton and Alberta have adopted, and that makes me very happy. The strategy seems to have potential. You also said that, as far as housing units go, there is a plan to create 3,350 of them.

Is that correct? If so, has the plan been implemented? Is there a schedule?

[*English*]

**Ms. Wendy Myshak:** We do have a schedule. This is from the city's plan, not the provincial plan. Their goal over 10 years is to build 3,500 units, and it's to be completed by 2018.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Excellent. Thank you very much. It is exciting to see how much faith you have in this plan, and we are very glad. We will keep track of your progress from afar. It is a good example.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** With that, I will say once again thank you for taking the time and thanks for being patient while our meeting was getting started.

I see, Wendy, that you have a final comment.

**Ms. Wendy Myshak:** I do. I just want to quickly say that Mr. Martin made a good point, speaking about your visit to the shelter, in saying that they are valuable citizens and it is a waste of humanity to have these individuals living on the street. One thing we try to do is not address the people as homeless people, because that brings to mind a characteristic, like saying tall people or blond people or people from Nova Scotia. We like to say “people experiencing homelessness” and emphasize that it is a very transient situation that they find themselves in, and it's not a characteristic of who they are. They aren't homeless. We really try not to use the phrase “homeless people”, but “individuals experiencing homelessness”, in the hope that it is something very short term that they will eventually move out of.

**Mr. Dave Ward:** I have a final comment. Obviously, a big thanks goes to the committee for all the efforts it is putting toward this issue and the awareness of it.

I also wanted to comment on Mr. Lessard's nice comments. We do have a lot of hope here in Edmonton. We are living in a city in the only province in Canada that has an effort to put a plan together to end homelessness in 10 years. The good work of Minister Fritz is huge, and obviously for Premier Stelmach this is an important issue.

Despite some of the economic challenges we may face, and whether or not the resources will necessarily be there at the end of the day to have the total impact we would like to have, we certainly recognize that there has been a fundamental shift in how homelessness is addressed in this province.

It is going to take a while to transition agencies to understand exactly what “housing first” actually means. It is going to take a while to ensure that the private sector comes on board with some unique projects in the future, but the team we have been able to formulate through the efforts of the commission and the political leadership and private sector leadership gives me confidence. That's why I have hope. I look forward to being able to report back to you with our executive director in the future about the kind of progress we are making.

Thank you.

• (1145)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.





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