



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

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

HUMA • NUMBER 041 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, February 14, 2017

—
Chair

Mr. Bryan May

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

Tuesday, February 14, 2017

•(1110)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.)): Welcome, everybody. I apologize for our tardiness getting started. We're usually pretty good on getting going on time, but as you know we had a vote this morning that interrupted a little.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, June 13, 2016, the committee is resuming its study on poverty reduction strategies.

I'm very pleased to welcome here today by video conference Kenneth Green from the Fraser Institute. We also have, from the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, Stéphan Corriveau, board president, and Jeff Morrison, executive director. From the City of Prince George, we have Mayor Lyn Hall and Chris Bone, manager of social planning. Finally, from the Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain, we have Émilie E. Joly, community organizer.

We're missing one witness. Hopefully he will join us.

Also, from the Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, we have Aluki Kotierk and Aqattuq Kiah Hachey joining us today.

I also wanted to acknowledge MP Hunter Tootoo who is joining us for the first time today. Welcome, sir.

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Nunavut, Ind.): Thank you.

The Chair: We're going to get started. Because we have so many joining us today we're going to keep the introductions to a maximum of seven minutes. We're going to start with Dr. Kenneth Green from the Fraser Institute.

The next seven minutes are yours, sir.

Dr. Kenneth Green (Senior Director, Natural Resources Studies, Fraser Institute): Good morning.

Thank you for inviting me and giving me this opportunity to testify on what I consider to be one of the most important topics in public policy in our time, which is poverty, and particularly for me, energy poverty. We've done some research into this, the first done in Canada, to look at this question and that's what I'm going to talk about to you today.

First, we need to understand that energy is absolutely omnipresent in the lives of Canadians. We take it for granted that when we plug something in, power will flow; when we flip a light switch, the lights

will go on; and when we gas up our car, the gas will be there and the car will function. But those are really the most superficial and obvious ways in which we consume energy.

We use energy to heat and cool our homes. We use energy to cook our food and to clean our homes and our clothes. We use energy to make the clothing that our children wear that keep them warm in the winter and keep them comfortable in the summer. We use energy to call our families and call 911 when we're ill or when someone else is ill. We use energy to preserve our foods and medicines.

Many people don't think about this, but without a refrigerator, your insulin is not preserved. Many of your drugs are not able to be preserved, and you can't necessarily have access to state-of-the-art health care. In fact, the cost of providing medical care is very highly infused in the cost of energy used to produce super-concentrated, pure, sterile substances that are moved while temperature controlled to the point of their destination so that you can have your modern, useful medications and medical treatments.

We use energy to transport ourselves to work, to home, to leisure destinations, and again to doctors, to clinics, to churches, to sporting venues, and to other countries to visit our families.

Energy is basically at the root of everything we do as Canadians and as people in a modern technological civilization. We use energy to produce virtually everything in the room around us. If you were to look around your room, everything you see started with an infusion of energy and is maintained on a daily basis with additional layers of energy put onto it in order to preserve the things that we make, use, and do.

Affordable, abundant energy is really central to the well-being of Canadians. This is the reason we wanted to look at the issue of Canadians' access to abundant, reliable, and affordable energy.

We know for a fact that many people around the world do not have that. According to the International Energy Agency, there are 1.2 billion people around the world who lack access to electricity. Think about that. They don't have access to electricity. They can't charge a cellphone. They can't turn on lights to study by. They don't have lights in their homes in order to read. They, of course, don't have televisions. They don't have access to modern technologies, and more importantly, they don't have access to the kinds of technologies and computers needed to teach their children so as to liberate them from physical labour and that sort of thing.

Another 2.7 billion people have to cook their food using biomass—that is, wood, dung, and other things such as that—indoors with poor ventilation, which causes a massive amount of disease.

That's internationally and that's not here in Canada, but we wanted to see what the situation was like in Canada, so we looked into the question of whether there is energy poverty in Canada and how much there is.

We used the definition that's used internationally, which is, if a household spends more than 10% of its total expenditures in the year just providing energy in the home, that's considered a definition of energy poverty because that's the point at which you start having to make significant trade-offs between buying higher quality foods or keeping the temperature where it's healthy and safe, getting your kids training in sports versus keeping the air conditioning going in the summertime or the heat going in the wintertime. The 10% threshold is recognized more or less internationally as a red line of entering into a state of energy poverty if you're paying that much just to heat your home.

We looked at this with data from Statistics Canada's survey of household spending here in Canada. We wanted to find out how much energy poverty there is in Canada. We were, frankly, surprised. In a country that considers itself, or has at times considered itself an energy superpower, we looked at the data and found out that when only energy used within the home—just heating, cooling, refrigeration, and that kind of thing—was included in the calculation, 7.9% of Canadian households were classified as being energy poor in the year 2013. That's when the latest data was available. That's up slightly from 7.2% back in 2010.

• (1115)

Atlantic Canada—and this, personally I found shocking—which is aggregated in the Statistics Canada data, so we can't pull it out by individual province, had the highest incidence of energy poverty in 2013. We found 20.6% of households were spending more than 10% of their entire expenditures just keeping the house warm. British Columbia had the lowest, at 5.3% of that level.

When gasoline expenses are included in the calculation, the incidence of energy poverty increases substantially. In 2013, 19.4% of Canadian households devoted at least 10% or more of their expenditures to energy, including both inside the home and for transportation. Alberta was the lowest, at 12.8%. There were five out of seven Canadian regions that experienced a decline in energy poverty from 2010 to 2013 when gasoline expenditures were included.

We also looked at where energy poverty falls with regard to income quintiles. What we found was that over 15% of the two lowest-income quintiles in Canada were in energy poverty when you included just energy in the home. When you included energy in the home plus the transportation that they needed to get to work, it was 30% of homes in the two lowest-income quintiles that were in energy poverty. Other income quintiles were much, much less.

I'll just give you a quick rundown by province. In 2013, 5.3% of households in British Columbia were in energy poverty; 6.8% in Alberta; 12.9% in Saskatchewan; 6.7% in Manitoba; 7.5% in Ontario; 6.2% in Quebec; 20%, as I said, in Atlantic Canada; and as

a whole, we had 8%. With fuel, gasoline, British Columbia had 14%; Alberta about 13%; Saskatchewan 23%; Manitoba 20%; Ontario 19%; Quebec 19%; Atlantic Canada almost 40%; and Canada as a whole, 19.4%.

In a powerful country like Canada, in a country that has some of the world's biggest energy resources found anywhere and the technologies to extract and develop and use those, we nonetheless have a significant fraction of Canadian households living under the definition of energy poverty. That is, they are spending a bigger share of their household expenditures to keep warm and to move them to and from work, to and from school, to and from sporting events, and to and from the supermarket. That's a significant component of poverty overall, because it is, as I said, in so much of what we do.

We were asked to come up with some strategies for reducing this, and I'd say—

• (1120)

The Chair: Sorry, could you just wrap up? Thank you.

Dr. Kenneth Green: I will, yes.

How could we reduce energy poverty? One thing we need to do is reconsider our current approach to energy and climate policy. We've settled on an immediate transition to renewable fuels, which are more expensive than conventional fuels such as gas, which is highly abundant and also a Canadian resource. We need to reconsider that approach and look at the previous approach, which was to accept that natural gas is going to be a bridge fuel until we can develop renewables that are more reliable and more affordable than the natural gas resources we have abundant to us here in Canada.

We need to increase our research and development into cleaner, more affordable renewables. Right now they're not deployable at scale in affordable ways. We need to find better ways to make those renewables cheaper so that people will want them, not have them imposed upon them.

We need to harmonize our energy regulations with U.S. markets. Our costs are higher than the U.S., our competitors, for manufacturing, as well as households. We need to find ways to bring our costs more into line with our American neighbours and competitors.

I would argue that those should be the focus of government right now, not necessarily aggressive greenhouse gas emission targets and more renewable energy targets that are not based on the reality of providing affordable, reliable, and abundant energy to Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir.

We're going to move quickly to our next speaker, who is Stéphan Corriveau, board president of the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association.

The next seven minutes are yours, sir.

Mr. Stéphan Corriveau (Board President, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the committee for undertaking this important study of a Canadian anti-poverty strategy. With me is Jeff Morrison, CHRA's executive director. We'll share our presentation.

[Translation]

As a national association representing the interests of the social and affordable housing sector in Canada, the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA) is really pleased that the committee has drawn a clear link between poverty reduction and access to safe and affordable housing.

Housing that meets those characteristics is essential to enable individuals and families to have access to healthy living, access to education and academic success, and access to stable employment, which helps establish and develop families. Those are fundamental cornerstones for an anti-poverty strategy.

Since housing is an indispensable need, the cost of housing and the share of household income that goes to it are among the main factors that determine poverty. Having access to affordable housing increases the ability of households in difficulty to get out of poverty and to improve their conditions in the long term. When we see the real numbers and the current situation in Canada, we may be shocked by the situation. Actually, 1.6 million households in Canada, which means more than 3.5 million people, spend in excess of 30% of their income on housing. These are renters, not people who invest to acquire property and develop capital. About 850,000 of those households spend more than 50% of their income on housing. We can easily imagine what the consequences are on their ability to feed themselves, to educate themselves, to raise children properly, and so on.

Households that are in such precarious situations are predominantly made up of people from groups subjected to discriminatory practices. They include indigenous people, single-parent families, low-income people, racial minorities, persons with physical disabilities or mental health issues. Problems of access to adequate housing and the strategies to address them would benefit from being considered from a human rights perspective.

We are making an important proposal that the right to adequate housing be explicitly recognized in Canadian legal instruments. Somewhere in Canadian legislation, there must be a reference indicating that we have the right to quality housing. We are talking about affordable and adequate housing.

As you know, just as we speak, while developing its anti-poverty strategy, the Canadian government is taking other steps to define a national housing strategy. As we understand it, following this consultation, the strategy will be announced shortly after the next budget. We are talking about the housing strategy, but it is essential that the poverty reduction strategy and the housing development strategy be closely linked.

While we were holding consultations, the CMHC hired independent firms to conduct surveys with all Canadians. There were all sorts of public consultations and private consultations, and a report with the results of the consultations was published.

In all the provinces, in all the regions of the country and in all the categories of stakeholders, people said that the housing and poverty issues were closely linked and that those two needs require a joint response. If it has been established that there's a link between the two and that it's the collective desire of Canadian society, of Canadians across the country, how do we go about developing this strategic framework?

In October 2016, during the consultations on the national strategy, CHRA presented a brief entitled "Housing at a Crossroads: CHRA's Vision for the Next Generation of Housing Policy in Canada". A copy of our brief was submitted to the clerk of the committee. You will be able to consult it.

We have an ambitious goal: by 2035, all Canadians and Canadian households should have access to safe, affordable and adequate housing.

There are 24 recommendations to do so in technical terms. We will not go through all 24 recommendations, but my colleague Mr. Morrison will present the main ones.

• (1125)

[English]

Mr. Jeff Morrison (Executive Director, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association): Thank you, Stéphan.

First, I will very quickly talk about our recommendations.

Our first key recommendation was to strengthen the role of housing as a social good. For example, we recommend specific measures to prevent and eliminate homelessness. We recommend the introduction of a federal program to subsidize the supply of rent-geared-to-income housing units available all across Canada. We talked about supporting supportive housing by increasing dedicated support to social services, because, after all, social housing is more than just a roof over a person's head. It also offers key social supports with regard to mental health and addictions, legal supports, and so forth, which are all instrumental in tackling poverty.

Second, we recommend that the existing supply of social housing capacity be maintained and that policy tools be put in place to grow the stock. With federal operating agreements already expiring, there's deep concern in the social housing sector as to whether non-profit providers can continue to offer subsidized housing to those in greatest need. In our submission, we identified some tangible policy options to maintain and grow capacity, such as expanding the surplus federal real property for homelessness initiative, which would essentially make land available, creating a stand-alone housing financing mechanism, and removing the GST from capital costs for social and affordable rental housing. By maintaining and increasing capacity, we're providing a necessary but required support for poverty alleviation.

Third, there's no question that Canada's urban and rural indigenous peoples suffer much higher rates of homelessness, core housing need, and substandard housing. For example, one in 15 urban indigenous people will experience homelessness compared to about one in 128 non-indigenous people. In 2011, a CMHC report revealed that 22% of non-reserve aboriginal households were living in homes that did not meet suitability standards, compared with 13% for non-aboriginal households. Social housing for urban and rural indigenous households faces a further challenge in that almost 100% of indigenous housing units are rent-geared-to-income models, meaning that the expiry of operating agreements will hit indigenous housing providers harder than other housing providers who employ a more mixed model.

As a result, CHRA is recommending that a distinct strategy to address rural and urban indigenous housing providers be created. Within that strategy, we recommend creating a unique indigenous housing trust, increasing investments in indigenous support service organizations, and improving indigenous representations within organizations such as CMHC.

Finally, a national housing strategy, just like an anti-poverty strategy, will be meaningless unless a robust implementation plan is put in place complete with national indicators and investment in research. That's why CHRA is recommending the creation of a housing research hub with a model somewhat similar to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, which would bring researchers and housing together to define gaps and report upon national housing and homelessness indicators.

Parliament should hold the government to account for the results of both its housing strategy and its anti-poverty strategy objectives, and having indicators complete with research is the best way to do that.

Mr. Stéphan Corriveau: Chair, there's no question that a strong housing system that meets the needs of Canada's most vulnerable population is a required basis for a national plan to address poverty. We congratulate the committee for undertaking this study and for its recognition of the importance of housing to combat poverty.

[*Translation*]

Once again, my thanks to the committee for inviting us to be part of this discussion.

• (1130)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much for being here. It was great testimony, and I'm looking forward to hearing some of the responses to the questions that I know are coming.

I want to just take two seconds to recognize that we've been joined by a very large group. This is probably the most we've ever had come to HUMA to witness one of our sessions. Can one of you explain where you're from?

Ms. Katherine Takpannie (As an Individual): We're from Nunavut Sivuniksavut. It's an eight-month Inuit college program for [*Inaudible—Editor*].

The Chair: That's fantastic, excellent. Thank you very much for coming.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: This is great.

I'd also like to acknowledge that we've been joined by Nicolas Luppens, coordinator of Groupe actions solutions pauvreté.

If you wish, if you are settled—I know you just sort of ran in—the next seven minutes could be yours, sir.

Mr. Nicolas Luppens (Coordinator, Groupe actions solutions pauvreté): Okay, let's go.

The Chair: We'll throw you right in. Go ahead.

Mr. Nicolas Luppens: Thank you for inviting me. I will speak in French because it's easier for me.

[*Translation*]

My name is Nicolas Luppens and I am the coordinator of the Groupe actions solutions pauvreté. Our organization is a round table on combatting poverty, located in Haute-Yamaska, near Granby in Quebec. We cover the entire Haute-Yamaska region. We work on developing a number of strategies and innovative approaches in order to find solutions for poverty. Our mandate is to look for measures and solutions to solve the problems of poverty in our own local area.

In the past, we worked within the framework of a provincial action plan called the Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion. From that initiative, we were able to draw certain conclusions. Having worked with those on the ground, today we are able to provide expertise at that level, expertise that really does come from the community organizations working very closely with the people.

I would now like to give you a summary of what we observe in our area.

Our region has a significant shortfall in social housing. In terms of the government strategy, social housing clearly is a priority. In Granby, for example, as for other cities in the country, there are five social housing units for every 1,000 inhabitants. We are well below the Quebec average and a long way behind some cities.

The fact that, in 1994, the federal government withdrew from the strategy to build social housing is critical for our area. So, in the next federal strategy to fight poverty, it is vital for social housing projects to be funded. From what we can observe on the ground, with the people with whom we work, this kind of involvement helps a lot of people. It means that they do not have to spend a major part of their income on housing. The cost of housing has sharply increased, not just in Montreal, but all across the country. So adopting a federal housing strategy is vital.

In addition, we are being affected more and more by the problem of homelessness. A growing number of homeless people are asking for emergency assistance with food and shelter. For example, in Granby in recent years, as in almost every other part of Quebec, the number of people seeking food assistance has increased between 10% and 20%. Food assistance strategies really need to be expanded, as do approaches to homelessness through the homelessness partnering strategy, which, in our opinion is not adequately funded. In our region, we need more funding for that strategy.

During the election campaign, the Liberal Party announced a food safety strategy. We want to prevent people on the ground from going hungry and from experiencing all the problems that causes in terms of looking for jobs, social inclusion, and so on. For us, this is fundamental. We need direct assistance to ease the hunger in households living in poverty.

In the few minutes that I have left, I will talk about the recommendations arising from the fact that we have introduced the Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion in Haute-Yamaska.

We have noticed that, over the past few years, provincial strategies have been one-time five-year action plans. They should have continued, but every time a new action plan was implemented, the services were cut.

For the organizations on the ground, that involves a loss of expertise every time. Those cuts also go hand in hand with a loss of resources and assistance. In addition, services cannot continue.

In the fight against poverty across Canada, strong leadership is needed to recognize the fundamental rights of people who live in poverty and to make the fight a priority across the country.

We need measures that last longer than two or three years, so that we don't have to start from scratch afterwards with a new budget.

As I said earlier, there is a loss of efficiency for stakeholders locally. There is also a loss of expertise when there are constant budget cuts.

We are asking that action be taken on the structural causes of poverty. Action needs to be taken at the level of basic needs, but it has to be done on a global scale. Let me explain.

Household income must be increased. We think that's one of the strategies that would make the most sense, given that households are being squeezed right now. As we know, there's a high debt load in Canada. A poverty reduction plan must be developed bearing in mind both people's income and housing, which is fundamental. Those are two core priorities that must be highlighted.

Measures must also be taken to reduce social inequalities. A number of sources indicate that social inequalities are not declining. The gap has been growing more and more in the past few years.

Access to public health services must be improved without discrimination. Those services must be universal and of high quality.

Attitudes must be changed, for instance by launching an awareness campaign, not just by putting up posters, but also by

reaching out to schools. An approach like that has worked for us. We have implemented local awareness strategies in primary schools and especially in secondary schools. That has produced excellent results. That has helped people understand poverty, feel more empathy for those people and avoid passing judgment too quickly. Even among decision-makers, there's sometimes prejudice that clouds their decisions. Young people should be educated, through the launch of a big national campaign explaining that poverty is not a choice.

As I said earlier, GASP recommends that the income of single people be increased. That's the category of people that has suffered the most from the latest social progress, if I may say so. Most of the social policies that have been implemented lately have targeted families a great deal. We now see that the situation of single people living in poverty has not improved. So the focus should be more on single individuals.

How much time do I have left?

• (1135)

[English]

The Chair: Two more seconds... Go ahead and wrap up.

[Translation]

Mr. Nicolas Luppens: Right.

I think that, overall, I've said what I wanted to say.

The action we're calling for isn't sporadic, but extends over time. That's the main recommendation we wanted to make today.

Thank you.

• (1140)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I understand that the brief you have is being translated and will be provided to everybody as well, so if there is anything you had to skip at the end there, we'll make sure we all see that.

We're going to go now, via video conference, to the city of Prince George with Mayor Lyn Hall and the manager of social planning, Chris Bone.

Your Worship, the next seven minutes are yours.

Mr. Lyn Hall (Mayor, City of Prince George): Thank you very much. I will ask Chris to start us off.

Ms. Chris Bone (Manager, Social Planning, City of Prince George): Thank you very much for the invitation to appear as a witness. The mayor has asked me to provide a few comments to set the context for his presentation.

We have reviewed the document, "Towards a Poverty Reduction Strategy", that was prepared by the Government of Canada and have reviewed all of the current and planned Government of Canada initiatives to support poverty reduction. In particular, over the coming months we look forward to more direction from the Government of Canada so we can appropriately mobilize our community to participate in the plan in person and in online consultation opportunities.

We also understand that, as part of the strategy, the Government of Canada will be launching the tackling poverty together project. We have some associated recommendations to make later in our presentation.

Our comments today, therefore, relate to what we understand to be the focus of the standing committee in relation to this broader consultation and strategy development process.

In terms of background, we would like to let you know that, in 2012, the city of Prince George was one of seven communities selected to participate in a pilot poverty reduction project that was initiated by the Province of B.C. and the Union of B.C. Municipalities.

That project was intended to provide low-income families with tailor-made springboards out of poverty. As such, the goal was to develop successful strategies that addressed the unique needs of families living in poverty. Over a two-year period, the City of Prince George actively facilitated a community process to identify what was needed to enable these low-income families and individuals to find their way out of poverty.

However, the City of Prince George withdrew from the pilot project when it was evident that without a provincial poverty reduction framework with the associated policies and resources, community organizations would only better serve those living in poverty, not give them a pathway out of poverty.

Since that time, the city has refocused its efforts. It has initiated a collective impact process with the assistance of the Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement. Our community has identified a shared vision of improving children's health, and we fully expect that poverty reduction will be one of the key strategies that enable the achievement of that vision.

Having said that, we know, as identified in Northern Health's chief medical health officer's report on growing up healthy in B.C., that we can only address poverty reduction with the support and resources of all levels of government.

With those brief comments, which also provide some context, I would now like to turn to Mayor Hall so that he can provide his comments to the committee.

Mr. Lyn Hall: Thank you very much, Chris.

Good morning, everyone.

In relation to its focus on housing, we want to urge the committee to carefully consider the analysis of consultation feedback outlined in the recently released Let's Talk Housing report. As noted in the report released by the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, the feedback was received through a broad range of outreach efforts, which helps to frame the challenges facing Canada's housing system and details innovative ideas.

The City of Prince George was an active contributor to the consultation process, as were a number of community-based organizations within the city of Prince George.

There are a number of themes that emerged from the consultation process that are particularly applicable to the city of Prince George, which serves as a service hub for many northern communities. For

those of you not familiar with Prince George, it is located in the central part of the province of B.C., and is, in fact, a hub to many service organizations, such as housing services, RCMP services, and medical services.

It helps indigenous people achieve better housing outcomes, adopts a housing systems perspective to ensure that housing needs across the continuum are addressed, and sets clear outcomes and targets in relation to housing so that progress can be monitored and reported. We want to take a collaborative approach to housing by building on the capacity of all orders of government to achieve a national vision of housing.

● (1145)

We would like the committee to recommend that Prince George, B.C., be chosen to participate in the tackling poverty together project. This will provide the opportunity to consider how utilization of a collective impact approach may enable systemic change in relation to poverty reduction, and it will provide the opportunity to shed light on the challenges associated with poverty reduction in the absence of a supporting provincial framework.

We are aware that no B.C. communities have been invited to participate in the tackling poverty together project, and we believe that in order to get a comprehensive picture of the Canadian context, B.C., and particularly a community with a large percentage of indigenous peoples as residents, must be included in the study.

In Prince George, we are also challenged with distressed neighbourhoods and urge the committee to consider how the federal government may be able to support, through policy and programs, a community development corporation model such as the one currently being trialled in Edmonton, Alberta. We note the model creates and expands economic opportunity for low-to-moderate income people in high-need neighbourhoods by implementing a full set of tools requiring a cross-governmental approach to poverty reduction that integrates both orders and departments of government.

Criteria for current funding programs often cause divisiveness amongst the very partners required to initiate innovative multi-sectoral approaches to addressing complex social issues. We'd like to close by reiterating the need for the committee to ensure the mechanisms necessary to ensure there is collaboration and commitment between levels of government to address poverty and that associated policies and funding initiatives are aligned with a shared vision.

It is also critical that poverty reduction targets be established and associated progress measured using a shared definition of poverty and agreed-to metrics.

Thank you very much to the committee for giving us an opportunity to say a few words, and we'll certainly be available for questions later on. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you for joining us today.

Now we'll go over to Émilie Joly from FRAPRU. You are joining us via video conference. The next seven minutes are yours.

[Translation]

Ms. Émilie E. Joly (Community Organizer, Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain): Good morning.

First, I would like to thank the committee for inviting FRAPRU to appear.

[English]

My presentation will be in French but I can take questions and discussion in English afterwards.

[Translation]

First of all, it is important to mention that FRAPRU is pleased with the federal government's interest in implementing a poverty reduction strategy. We hope that the federal government's next efforts will lead to a real poverty reduction strategy that takes a holistic view, rather than arriving at piecemeal strategies, measures or programs.

In our view, in a strategic way, if we really want to focus on poverty reduction measures, we must inevitably begin by recognizing economic, social and cultural rights, which go hand-in-hand. In our view, not only should the recognition of economic, social and cultural rights be the basis for public policies, but it is also one of the key ways to ensure the long-term basis for these policies, so that the next poverty reduction strategy is not the effort of a single government, in this case the one in place. At the moment, the development of a Canadian poverty reduction strategy, along with the national housing strategy, provides an opportunity to build a strong foundation for the long term.

Some of my colleagues have already spoken about this, but I am pleased to be able to emphasize the importance of the right to housing in the fight against poverty. FRAPRU is a group whose main focus is the right to housing and the fight against poverty. We believe that the right to housing is the cornerstone for ensuring that several other rights are respected and, as a result, meeting several other needs. As my CHRA colleague said, if you do not have a place to live, it's hard to talk about adequate food, and if you spend too much on housing, you're not able to meet all of your other housing needs. It is important to keep in mind that housing is one of the essential determinants of health. A poverty reduction strategy cannot be built without a comprehensive analysis of needs and the right to housing.

Today, we are discussing a poverty reduction strategy. At FRAPRU, we are convinced that in a country as rich as Canada, not only do we have the means to reduce poverty, but we should also really be moving towards a strategy to eradicate it.

The portrait of renter households in Canada is rather disastrous for such a rich country. My colleagues talked about that a little while ago. It was mentioned that there are four million tenants in the country, of whom there are 1.6 million tenant households whose needs are considered urgent, that is, they pay too much or they have a housing that doesn't meet their needs. That said, another figure is even more striking. I don't want to dwell too much on statistics, but I think there are some that must awaken our consciences. In Canada, 1 in 10 tenants spend more than 80% of their income on housing. So close to 400,000 renter households in Canada are forced to spend 80% of their income just to pay their rent. You can imagine that there isn't much left after that for their other needs. This is not to mention the homelessness situation in Canada and the tragic situation in many indigenous and northern communities, where there is a very

high rate of inadequate housing. These communities also lack easy access to electricity and drinking water.

What can be done about the right to housing in order to address these problems? FRAPRU has put forward three solutions.

First, long-term subsidies for existing social housing must inevitably be maintained. We can't rely solely on the \$30 million allocated in Minister Morneau's budget from last year. In the long term, the financial accessibility of existing social housing must be ensured.

In addition, we must focus our efforts on creating programs to build new social housing. At FRAPRU, we did the calculations and determined that the CMHC budget should be doubled to meet all the needs. So the amount should be increased from \$1.7 or \$2 billion to \$4 billion, just to build new social housing and make sure that these units are affordable to low-income households in the long term. That's what social housing can do.

At the moment, there are several discussions on how to best ensure the right to housing and to ensure that low-income households have access to decent housing. Individual aid often has adverse effects, such as rent increases. We are convinced that we can fight poverty through affordable and long-term social housing.

Finally, we need a national housing strategy that recognizes the right to housing from the get-go and serves as a cornerstone for building long-term programs. As mentioned, it is difficult to build with programs spanning two or three years. A long-term, massive investment strategy is required to enable communities, community groups, cities, provinces and territories to build and plan for the long term.

Lastly, I will say a few words on the importance of transfers to the provinces.

For us, the fight against poverty isn't a matter of provincial, territorial or federal jurisdiction. There are already very adequate transfer mechanisms in place to make investments in the fight against poverty. These transfers have to be much larger. Several transfer amounts have not been indexed. Compared to 1990 levels in constant dollars, they are well below what they should be.

Clear priorities need to be established to ensure that some of the transfers in the fight against poverty, housing in particular, are not used to replace budgetary envelopes already set out by the provinces. These transfers have to be used to make additional investments in social infrastructure, for example. We must ensure that this money will be used for the construction and renovation of infrastructure, which will make it possible in the longer term to fight poverty effectively.

• (1155)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much. Also, I note that your brief is being submitted for translation and will be distributed as soon as it's available.

Last but definitely not least, we welcome the Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction.

Aluki, the next seven minutes are all yours.

Ms. Aluki Kotierk (President, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction): [*Witness speaks in Inuktitut*]

I want to thank you for the opportunity to make a presentation on behalf of the Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction.

My name is Aluki Kotierk. I'm the president for Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated. I'm here with Aqattuq Kiah Hachey, who is the assistant director for social and cultural development. Before I begin I'd like to extend a special recognition and welcome to the Nunavut Sivuniksavut students.

[*Witness speaks in Inuktitut*]

Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, NTI, is the co-chair of the Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction with the Government of Nunavut. As you already may be aware Nunavut has 25 communities. The population is a little over 35,000, and of that, more than 85% are Inuit. Because the territory is so vast, politically, Inuit are represented by three different regions, by three different regional Inuit associations. In the east, we have Qikiqtani association. In the centre, we have Kivalliq association. In the west, we have the Kitikmeot association.

In recent living history, Inuit were moved from the land to communities, which explains the 25 communities that I just referenced. Inuit, as you may be aware, were a nomadic gathering and hunting society. Traditionally, Inuit didn't have a wage economy, yet they were able to provide for their food and shelter needs. There was no formal school system as we know currently but there were intricate ways in which knowledge was passed from parents, and from grandparents.

Inuit governed themselves autonomously and were not subject to policies from the government. Above all, Inuit were self-reliant and interdependent on each other in their family group. They were masters of their own destiny, of their own lives. I like to think of Inuit as the original affluent society because they had the skill sets to live on the land and were able to provide for their needs.

For many Inuit, poverty is associated with contemporary society. We will look at the numbers currently in Nunavut. In 2014, the median income reported for Nunavut, before tax, was \$26,098, with 25% of the population reporting income less than \$8,589. In Nunavut, 40% of the population are recipients of income assistance. Nunavut-wide, 52% live in social housing, with 38% of social housing tenants living in overcrowded conditions. In Nunavut, 56% of Inuit households are food insecure. This was recently highlighted in a Statistics Canada report on Inuit Nunangat last week. The cost of

living, as you know, is 30% higher, with food costing twice as much as in southern Canada.

I will just talk a little about the poverty definition. The conventional definition of poverty used in Canada and internationally is a formula of various states of inequity and unfulfilled need conditions that were introduced in what is now our territory during the colonization process. Many of the indicators we use to measure the extent of poverty in Nunavut today are based in ways of living that emerged in our new communities.

• (1200)

The Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction in 2012 commissioned a report called "Understanding Poverty in Nunavut". It outlines three elements that are used to measure poverty: financial poverty, not having enough income for basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing; capability poverty, lacking the skills or health to meet their needs and participate fully in their community; and social exclusion, being excluded from economic, political, or community opportunities as a result of barriers to participation.

Since then, the poverty reduction round table has defined poverty in Nunavut as a situation that exists today in Nunavut when people cannot access the supports they need to maintain their connection to the land or to participate fully in a wage-based economy.

I'll just give you a background on the process by which we developed the round table for poverty reduction in Nunavut. In August 2010, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated and the Government of Nunavut entered into a co-sponsorship partnership for the creation of the poverty reduction strategy for Nunavut. Learning from the Nunavut suicide prevention strategy community engagement model, NTI and the GN developed community engagement models for poverty reduction in Nunavut.

Members of the Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction include all the Nunavut communities and hamlets; regional Inuit associations, which include elder and youth representatives; businesses; and not-for-profit organizations and wellness centres.

Between August 2010 and November 2011, many dialogues on poverty and how to reduce it were undertaken across the territory, such as community round tables, a policy workshop, and ultimately, a territorial poverty reduction summit, held in November 2011 in our capital city of Iqaluit. Participants in the summit collectively drafted the *makimaniq* plan. For those of you who don't understand Inuktitut, "*maki*", the root word, means "to stand up, to rise", so *makimaniq* is the way in which we stand up.

The *makimaniq* plan was finalized in February 2012. This plan was created in response to the issue of poverty in Nunavut. The Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated allowed voices of each and every community to be heard. The *makimaniq* plan is our response to the poverty we see across our territory.

As stated in this plan:

Public engagement allows for the community voice to be amplified, as the process builds from the community level to the regional level to the territorial level. The essence of this process is respect for community perspectives, capacity and self-determination, demonstrated in the public community dialogues that took place across Nunavut. Dialogues informed regional roundtable discussion.

The *makimaniq* plan focuses strongly on community self-reliance and collaboration, and relies on Inuit traditions of working together—*piliriqatigiingniq*—and helping one another to address the root causes of poverty. The themes include collaboration and community participation, healing and well-being, education and skills development, food security, housing and income support, and community and economic development.

Themes for each round table have been consistent with priorities set out in the *makimaniq* plan and have been determined by round table members. Past themes have included *inunnguiniq*, justice and community healing, and income assistance.

I want to spend a few minutes talking about *inunnguiniq*—

• (1205)

The Chair: I really hate to interrupt you.

I have your brief in front of me, and I see that you have quite a bit left to go. We're actually two minutes over. I can have this translated and get it out to all the committee members.

I'm going to give you another 30 seconds to wrap up. It goes by quickly, I know.

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: When you think about how best to support Nunavut Inuit in the area of poverty, I ask you to think ultimately about rebuilding self-reliance among Inuit. I ask that you incorporate Inuktitut and Inuit ways of being. I ask that you think about social infrastructure in terms of transitional housing and second-stage housing, wellness centres and youth centres in all communities, and spaces for not-for-profits to operate, and that you think about mental health and addictions in terms of substance abuse treatment centres and mental health and wellness funding.

It is important to explore barriers in language and otherwise in the federal eligibility criteria and policies that impact Nunavummiut who speak Inuktitut: the nutrition north program, the employment assistance program, the charitable organization system, and the tax system.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: Thank you for your time.

The Chair: We're going to get started right away with questions.

First up is MP Zimmer, please.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Thank you.

I know there's a lot to say. It's unfortunate we have to limit time on such an important topic, but it is what it is. A lot of people have input.

I want to focus on Mayor Hall and Ms. Bone from Prince George. I want to thank you, especially, for appearing today. You have to get up early to appear at committee in Ottawa, thanks.

One thing that got my attention specifically was what the Prince George housing strategy steering committee had come up with. Chris, I believe, was part of it back in 2011-12 and continues to be part of the Prince George plan today.

One topic I've brought up a lot in this study is that we don't want to sustain poverty. We want to have a reduction strategy. That's the

one reason you're appearing today because Prince George is very forward thinking in that you have a plan to get somebody out of poverty, and to me that is a great plan.

Can you explain why you saw the need to formulate a housing strategy in Prince George and how has this strategy been rolling out?

Ms. Chris Bone: I'll respond and Mayor Hall can certainly add anything to it.

The City of Prince George formed a standing committee on housing and homelessness several years ago for the most part to achieve better collaboration among the partners who work on housing strategies in the community. We work very closely with community organizations and are aware that the City of Prince George only has a very small contribution to make to that overall housing strategy.

The strategy identified a number of key things that we highlighted during our presentation this morning, the primary one being that we need the support of all levels of government to ensure attention to housing along the continuum. When we first formed as a standing committee, our focus was on homelessness and providing an opportunity for people who were on the street or close to the street to find housing. Our attention as a community has now shifted to how we provide sustainable, long-term housing that's not just shelter housing for individuals. Our challenge of course is that we don't always have enough space in our community. Moving forward, I think one of our greatest pleas to this committee is to help us with the infrastructure that's needed so we can house people along the continuum and ensure that housing is more sustainable.

Are we there? Is our strategy perfect? It isn't because it's reliant on the contributions of all levels of government and certainly the contributions of a number of community organizations that have to collaborate.

• (1210)

Mr. Lyn Hall: To add, the other piece of this that we identified in our presentation this morning and is so crucial to the work that Chris is doing is the fact that we're a hub city and we're a regional service centre. That impacts any strategy that we put forward around poverty reduction or housing. It's one of the first considerations many times because of the regionalization we deal with.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: The one thing that I appreciated too, from Prince George's approach, is that it involved all aspects of the population. Seniors were my introduction. Prince George had a strategy to have seniors who weren't necessarily of means to have a place to live out their days in comfort and support. The seniors housing announcement in Prince George was one of the first announcements I made. You saw how deeply involved in this process Prince George was.

I'd like to bring a graphic to the committee. I know we didn't have it before. It wasn't tabled, but it's the housing continuum graphic that you have in your strategy. This goes to what I was saying before about taking people out of poverty, taking them from emergency shelters, transitional and supportive housing, which is deemed a non-market temporary category; to mid-category independent social housing and rent assistance, the non-market permanent part of the strategy; up to below market home ownership; all the way up to affordable rental and home ownership. To me, that's a very progressive way of looking at getting people all the way from emergency shelters, which is the point where we need to take care of people, to transitioning them to where they're sustaining themselves and living in a comfortable home.

Can you explain a bit more what that looks like, to integrate what Prince George is contributing? Because I think you understate financially what Prince George is contributing to this happening.

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds, sir.

Mr. Lyn Hall: Just quickly, one of the things we did early on—about a year and a half ago, as you know, MP Zimmer—was to be very aggressive in seniors housing. There was a lack of housing in our community for seniors. We now have a 175-unit seniors housing complex going up. It will be fully functional within the next eight to 10 months. We heard loud and clear from seniors that these are the kinds of facilities they require.

We continue to be really aggressive in trying to create good, solid, affordable seniors housing, and I think that's one of the big steps we've taken within our own strategy.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thank you very much.

Ms. Chris Bone: We've been able to do that through such considerations as land gifts and development cost charges. We've actioned a variety of municipal local government tools in support of affordable housing development.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Chair, can I ask that they table that housing strategy for the committee?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Excellent. Thank you.

The Chair: No problem.

We'll go to MP Robillard for the next six minutes.

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to welcome everybody, especially the Inuit students from Nunavut. Usually I ask my questions in French, but since you don't all have hearing devices, I'll try to ask in English today.

First, to the representatives from Nunavut, we know that Inuit communities get their government funds through a distinct channel when compared with the reserves. With that in mind, could you reiterate the needs that you see on the ground and explain how a new government program in a poverty reduction strategy could help solve those problems?

As well, Inuit youth are one of the fastest-growing populations. How are you predicting housing needs based on this growth?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: *Qujannamiik.*

I'll just reiterate the things that are outlined in our *makimaniq* plan. They include collaboration and community participation, healing and well-being, education and skills development, food security, housing and income support, and community and economic development.

I know we're limited for time, so I would invite everyone to look at our website, www.makiliqta.ca.

One area I'd like to expand on is education and skills development, because I think if there are investments in our people, in Inuit, then they will be able to do their part to get out of poverty. Given the drastic changes we had from the land to the communities, we're still working through how we address that. We're starting to get our footing in the modern world, but my view is that we can be modern and Inuk. We can still have a strong identity in being Inuk and also be part of the Canadian story.

I think investment needs to be focused on our people, however, so that our people are able to be in decision-making positions and make positive improvements in all aspects, including housing, child care, food security, and things of that nature.

● (1215)

Mr. Yves Robillard: Turning now to housing, can you tell us more, just broadly, about the needs you see as far as housing is concerned? What are your thoughts on how at the federal level we can best help to fix those issues? As well, what can you tell us about the situation regarding the poverty faced by elderly people in the north? What are their housing conditions?

Could you also provide us with data for both your answers to these questions, please?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: *Qujannamiik.*

I'd like to commit to provide that data to the committee.

In terms of elders, I think there's currently an emerging issue in Nunavut. Many of our elders are being sent to Ottawa and other southern places because we don't have facilities that can house elders when they need support. I find this particularly concerning given that many of our elders are not able to speak English. There are not enough supports in our southern cities, including Ottawa, to provide patient care in Inuktitut or to provide "country food", as we Inuit call the food we get from the land. I think that's a real concern currently and we need to find a solution for that.

Following this appearance, we'll write to the committee and provide information regarding your specific questions about housing.

If you don't mind, I'll ask Kiah to add to that.

Ms. Aqattuq Kiah Hachey (Acting Assistant Director, Department Social Cultural Development, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., Nunavut Roundtable for Poverty Reduction): Statistically, as Aluki referred to earlier, 52% of our people are living in social housing units; and of those units, 38% of tenants are living in overcrowded conditions. I just want to make that clear as well.

Then, on the private market level, to give you a direct example in Iqaluit, as the standard rate for a three-bedroom home in terms of home ownership we are looking at around \$500,000. I just want to throw that out there as well for context.

We have a lot of very real housing challenges. We can provide that in writing, further to this. We have already provided a submission to the standing committee on housing in November. We can follow up with that.

Mr. Yves Robillard: I still have a quick question. What would a new urban housing strategy for Inuit communities entail? What would you like to see proposed as it's being drawn up? Do you think it is at all possible for federal health to be provided without going through the provinces and territories?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: I think the key to that would be long-term stable funding. As you know, in Inuit Nunangat, there's overcrowding and a shortage of housing all the time, but we're always in a position where we have to make a case as to why we need additional funding for housing, when, as was recently confirmed, our population is one of the fastest growing.

Mr. Yves Robillard: It's very interesting to see the help you'll be getting from this young group, the young generation. They are from all over Nunavut, and we'll see in the very near future them working with you on getting things solved.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

For the next round of questions, we'll go to MP Boutin-Sweet.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will ask my questions in French.

CHRA and FRAPRU are both talking about housing strategies based on human rights and the right to housing. As you know, I am very supportive of that because I introduced a bill in the House of Commons that specifically calls for the right to housing to be included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. My colleague Ms. Rachel Blaney also presented one on the subject.

I would like to move on to the issue of housing for aboriginal people, since Inuit representation has increased considerably in the room this morning.

CHRA mentioned specific strategies for aboriginal people. It even talked about

[English]

unique housing trust.

[Translation]

According to Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, the shortage on reserves and in villages will reach 115,000 units by 2031. Forty-one percent of households live in homes requiring major repairs, and 51% of units have mould. I saw it myself when I visited Nunavik.

FRAPRU's brief speaks of poor housing conditions, saying that this constitutes a blockage that prevents access to other human rights.

I would like to know what FRAPRU and CHRA mean when they talk about blocked access to other human rights and

[English]

unique housing trust.

[Translation]

I will ask you to answer first.

[English]

I will then ask the two women from Nunavut to give us their points of view.

We rarely ask for your point of view on that.

• (1220)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphan Corriveau: With respect to an aboriginal and indigenous strategy for the right to housing, in this area as in others, aboriginal people must have both hands on the wheel, as someone said. We think it is essential to learn from the mistakes of the past, where the development of community housing, social housing and housing in general was not well-thought-out, well-designed or understood by the people in the community. We mustn't make these mistakes anymore. The people of the communities themselves must control the process.

Faced with this situation, the federal government obviously has a fiduciary responsibility, which has been confirmed several times by the courts. For us, that means that a significant portion of the population across Canada has needs, but nowhere are those needs as strong as they are in the aboriginal population. Part of the problem is that indigenous people weren't the ones controlling the mechanisms.

There has to be a separate strategy because there is a distinct situation in terms of national rights, and statistics show that. We have a two-tier regime, and it is important that aboriginal communities, including Inuit communities, have the means to catch up and get what the general population had before.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: I would now like to hear from the witnesses.

Ms. Joly, could you answer my question?

Mrs. Emilie E. Joly: Yes, of course.

Certainly, we are in favour of CHRA's approach to this. For us, it is essential that communities be at the heart of housing development. We need to make sure that housing really meets the needs of those people. In communities recognized as reserves under the Indian Act, housing is ill-suited to reality, which, as in the case of Nunavut, or Nunavik, Quebec, is a northern reality.

In our view, the investment in housing in the provinces must be managed locally and respond to needs in collaboration with local communities. For us, it's inevitable.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Ms. Joly, what about blocking access to other programs?

Mrs. Emilie E. Joly: Yes, that's exactly what I was getting at. In aboriginal communities, in particular, but across Canada as well, we are seeing that if the right to housing isn't recognized, especially if there is no respect for that right, access is blocked to resources to meet other needs, particularly for low-income or middle-income families. We talked about energy poverty, but when you're homeless, what can you really heat?

We have a responsibility toward Canadians. The government must ensure that these rights are respected. For us, housing is really the cornerstone of the potential poverty reduction strategy. Indeed, without housing that is affordable, good quality and in good condition, meeting other needs is unthinkable, especially when it comes to food.

As I said earlier, 1 in 10 renters in Canada spend 80% of their income on housing. We can only imagine what these people have left over to clothe and feed themselves, and meet their other needs.

• (1225)

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Thank you very much.

A few seconds remain if the other two women would like to answer the question.

[English]

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: If I understood the question properly, in terms of Nunavut housing, Kiah has already talked about the overcrowded housing situation that we have. I think it impacts people's abilities for education when they don't have any place to do their homework, and there are so many people that they have to take turns sleeping.

On another level, it impacts people's health. As you may be aware, in Nunavut, among Inuit, TB is still rampant, and when we're in overcrowded situations, it does not help.

In terms of the setup of the house, it is important to include Inuit knowledge and Inuit ways of being with regard to how the house is set up. Many of us like to have an open space where we can eat our country food on the floor, so the house needs to be designed in such a way that it respects Inuit culture. It would be helpful, for instance, if there were areas where we could clean skins and prepare them for use, and some of the designs are not thinking of how Inuit would use the house.

One of the greatest challenges we also have is in terms of supports for owning a home, given that we have such a high rate of poverty and that we don't have banking services in many of our communities. There is no credit that Inuit maintain, in terms of credit scores, so

trying to purchase a house, even if there were a house available for sale.... There are so many barriers to home ownership.

The Chair: Thank you. I'm afraid that's the end of the time.

We now move over to MP Wayne Long, please.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our guests, and welcome to the students this afternoon.

My riding is the city of Saint John—Rothesay and we do lead the country, as a city, in child poverty, but I have to say that, listening to your presentations, we pale in comparison to the challenges you face.

If the committee is okay with it, I would like to share some of my time to ask some questions today with MP Tootoo.

Is everybody okay with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Hunter Tootoo: Thank you, Mr. Long, and Mr. Chair and committee members, for giving me this opportunity.

I think you can guess I'm going to focus specifically on Nunavut, as we have Aluki here.

Mr. Robillard asked about the housing situation. When I was housing minister in Nunavut, probably about five years ago, we needed about 3,300 units just to meet our current demand. That was growing with a forced growth that I think is now between 75 and 90 units a year. That's over a billion dollars just to meet our current demand right now, and that was a number of years ago.

On top of that you have the other issue that was mentioned, the declining funding from CMHC on the social housing agreement. That's putting an extra burden on the jurisdictions to be able to maintain the units.

My question for Aluki is this. You mentioned long-term, stable funding. I know that's something that the Government of Nunavut has always been pushing for, to allow for better planning and expenditure of those resources, and not just with housing. Do you see the lack of what you called "social infrastructure" in the communities as partly the result of a flawed funding model, not only for Nunavut but for NWT as well?

Basically, the funding over the years has been allotted on a per capita basis. You have a jurisdiction with the highest cost of any kind of living, a small population, and one-fifth of the land mass of Canada. Do you see the inadequacy of historical funding as contributing to the lack of social infrastructure and making it difficult for Inuit people to get out of the poverty that we're stricken with?

• (1230)

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: *Qujannamiik.* Thank you for that question.

This touches upon something that I've talked about quite frequently, that in Canada it's coast to coast to coast. It's not just coast to coast. I know that in building Canada, through the nation-building exercise, there was a lot of infrastructure investment from the east to the west. This is an opportune time to say that there needs to be that kind of investment in the Arctic, in Inuit Nunangat.

An Arctic infrastructure strategy would be ideal, rather than one-offs where we get a pool today and focus on a treatment centre tomorrow. There should be some kind of thought on how we're building Canada, given that so many of us Canadians like to say that we're a northern country. It's important that Canada make investments in its north, not in an ad hoc way but thinking about the infrastructure needs that we have, whether it be electricity generators or the infrastructure we have at the community level, which includes housing.

There's an endless supply of needs in our territory and across Inuit Nunangat, so I think it needs to be part of that broader vision of what Canada is, particularly when we're going into Canada 150.

Hon. Hunter Tootoo: Another thing I want to touch on that has been mentioned a few times here is the nutrition north program. I was at the indigenous affairs standing committee and there was a consensus that the program was like the analogy of the chicken and the egg. Everyone knew that egg was going to be scrambled before the program even started. That's how wonderful it is.

Do you feel the program should be just for nutritious food, or should it be adjusting and giving people the opportunity to be in line with the rest of Canada for basic needs. I mean things that you buy that you need every day, like toilet paper, diapers, toothpaste, different things like that? The program used to cover some of that stuff, and now that they've changed it just to cover nutritious food, it's more of a step backwards. The subsidy that there used to be for some of the basic things that you use every day has disappeared, and the price of that stuff has gone up.

Do you think that the program should focus on just the basic needs that everyone has on a daily basis, or should it be expanded?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: Absolutely, I think it should be focused on basic needs. It even begs the question, whose nutritious food? Whose idea of nutritious food is it based on? Many of us, for instance, will eat caribou, fish, or walrus, and we supplement it with *palauga*, bannock made with white flour. It is absurd for the federal government to tell me that white flour is not nutritious, because I'm adding it to my nutritious food.

On a side note not necessarily related to nutrition north, I think there needs to be investment in harvesters, and the cost of small equipment that harvesters require to be able to get their own nutritious and healthy foods to put on their own tables.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Tootoo, for bringing that experience to the table.

Now we are over to MP Dhillon for the next six minutes.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): I'm going to be splitting my time with MP Ruimy.

[*Translation*]

My question is for the FRAPRU representative.

Earlier, you talked about federal and provincial jurisdictions. Do you think the federal strategy should specify where the money must be used, even if the matter is provincial?

• (1235)

Ms. Émilie E. Joly: Respecting jurisdictions is important to us. Having said that, I think we have to get to a point where the federal government, and the provincial and territorial governments are really working together to improve their planning. We often see that investments are made for cycles that do not always match, and that planning is not necessarily linked up either. With respect for provincial, territorial and federal jurisdiction, we are convinced that it is possible for governments to better align their planning.

Furthermore, I think the federal government has some opportunities right now. It can include investments that will go through provincial and territorial programs, but will be dedicated to long-term planning.

The importance of social infrastructure development was mentioned earlier as part of the national housing strategy. In our view, when you use the term “social infrastructure”, it means that you have to think of infrastructure and, therefore, of construction. If each province and territory hasn't already done so—and most of them have—they should establish construction and renovation programs of social housing and affordable housing. These programs will allow for the implementation of federal investments, but the federal government must distribute these funds to the right places. Therefore, long-term infrastructure planning is needed to build new social housing, for instance. We think the programs are there, and the federal, provincial and territorial governments need to work together to have not only short-term programs, but also longer-term planning.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Do you think that funds should be distributed to particular groups, such as vulnerable groups? I'm thinking of seniors and women in particular. I think women submit a lot of the applications for social housing. There are also refugees.

Ms. Émilie E. Joly: My colleague talked earlier about families. I think the Government of Quebec, among others, and the Government of Canada have made a lot of effort to improve the situation of families in recent years, and it has worked well.

In reality, single people often live in very precarious situations. That's often the case for single women, especially older women, for instance. There are many needs, but you can't just have directed policies. Of course, we have to work to get more seniors out of poverty, but we can't tell people they need to wait until they are 65 before we can help them out of poverty. We need programs that focus on early childhood, families and single people, and then we can respond to particular situations.

Minister Morneau's last budget contained interesting investments, for example for women who are victims of spousal violence and need quick access to emergency housing. However, we believe that a poverty reduction strategy must have a comprehensive vision that meets all needs. We are convinced that Canada has the means to respond to all needs. I don't think that pitting needs against each other is a good strategy.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you.

I'll now turn things over to my colleague.

[English]

Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.): Thank you very much, everybody, for being here.

The Chair: Sorry, can I just interrupt for a second?

I know a lot of people here have never been here before, but during the testimony we ask that people refrain from taking any photographs. Thank you.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: As I was saying, there are so many questions and so little time.

Very quickly, Monsieur Corriveau, how do you see being able to leverage the infrastructure bank that's been talked about to address some of the housing needs? We hear that housing is a big portion of poverty.

Mr. Stéphan Corriveau: There are two things about the infrastructure bank. First is that it is being designed, as we speak, as an investment program that will return for those who will be investing through the bank. We are saying that one must be careful that the bank is not there to suck up the money that should be dedicated to fighting poverty.

Social infrastructure should have a different treatment. Maybe it will go through the bank or maybe there is another means of doing it, but for the money being channelled through the bank, investors are being told now that they should be expecting between a 4% and 6% rate of return. At this point, we can get lower rates by going to RBC. The bank will have no added value if it goes that way.

The second thing about the bank is that it will invest in transit lines, for example, new bridges, new trains, and stuff like that. That has major impacts on housing conditions in the different municipalities and different territories where this will be happening. We urge the Canadian government to make sure that if there are investments that have an impact on housing through the infrastructure bank, those investments be screened and tested and harmonized with a vision that includes housing impacts.

● (1240)

Mr. Jeff Morrison: Can I just very quickly add to that?

There's been a lot of talk about the infrastructure bank that Minister Morneau announced as the lending vehicle for housing. One concern with that bank concept, which we've heard from our members, is that it's simply not scalable. It's essentially there for the bigger projects, and if you're a smaller housing provider you simply won't be eligible.

What we've called for, in addition to the bank, is the creation of a distinct and separate housing financing authority, which you can call

a bank or whatever, that is scalable so that smaller providers are eligible. It should be long term in nature so as to lower risk, and the loans should be guaranteed by the federal government, perhaps by CMHC. As well, the rates of course should be attractive enough to make it better than what a provider could get from their bank down the street.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Sorry, Mr. Ruimy, but we are now going over to MP Poilievre for six minutes.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): In these discussions we often ask how government can help solve the problems of poverty. We forget that often government is the problem. We often ask, for example, how the government can transfer wealth from those who have to those who have not. We forget that often the government transfers from those who have not to those who already have.

One example, one proven case, of this, of course, is the case of energy poverty, on which the Ontario Association of Food Banks just wrote a very extensive report pointing out that 60,000 low-income Ontarians have had their electricity cut off.

People are going to the food banks because they can't afford their \$700 electricity bills. The cause of these high prices is not market pricing. It's not that there's not enough electricity. In fact, we have an oversupply of electricity in Ontario, more than we use. In fact, we're giving it away or paying other jurisdictions to take it. The government intervened to pay 90¢ or 80¢ for something that's worth 2.5¢ in order to subsidize wind and solar power, which constitute a tiny fraction of the electrical mix of the province.

We know the people at the lowest end of the income scale suffer the most because electricity is a bigger share of their budget. We know that wealthy investment bankers have profited, because they're the ones who have been able to secure the contracts. This is a classic wealth transfer from those with the least to those with the most.

Dr. Green, you have been talking about energy poverty today. Do you have any way of calculating the distributional impacts of the Green Energy Act in Ontario; that is, how much wealth has been taken from low-income and impoverished people and how much has been transferred to the extremely wealthy?

Dr. Kenneth Green: We don't have a metric of that exactly, in terms of how the wealth was transferred from group A to group B. The auditor general has documented the extra costs paid by Ontarians for electric power compared with what they would have paid at normal market rates for, say, hydro and natural gas power generation. The exact extent of the wealth transfer you mentioned is very hard to document simply because we can't tell, in many cases, who exactly is getting the money. The Ontario power costing scheme is quite opaque. It's not very transparent, so it's hard to know exactly how much.

I would also like to point out, though, your opening statement, which is that sometimes government is part of the problem. That also applies to housing. I can talk about that as somebody who has looked at housing supply and availability in Canada. I've found there is a significant amount of red tape that slows the production and is preventing the market from actually matching supply with demand.

What we can say again is that in energy poverty, we have found the two lowest-income quintiles are by far the most affected by energy poverty across Canada. We expect that to be so in Ontario as well, and perhaps even exaggerated. As you pointed out, lower-income households expend more of their spending on energy to begin with. They live in less-insulated homes, have older vehicles that have lower fuel economy, and have greater needs to drive longer distances to work, from far suburbs into urban cores, where they can't afford to live. They can't afford to live where their work is. The impacts of high energy costs are highly regressive on the fixed income, the low income, the elderly, and those of limited means.

• (1245)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: That wealth transfer, according to the auditor general, has already been \$36 billion, and it will be another \$137 billion over the next roughly 19 years, so we're talking about a wealth transfer of \$170 billion, probably the biggest single wealth transfer from one group to another in my lifetime.

On the issue of red tape, you have produced a report that shows the enormous cost per unit of housing in red tape. For example, in the municipality of Oakville, \$60,500 is the cost of compliance. That does not include materials or labour; it's just paperwork. In other jurisdictions it ranges from \$20,000 to \$50,000. Of course, that can make the difference between someone affording a home and not affording it. That's in addition to the 7,200 square kilometres' worth of land that the Ontario government bans GTA-builders from developing.

Can you talk about the impact of all of these restrictions on low-income people?

Dr. Kenneth Green: The issue you're referencing is a report we did on housing in the Greater Golden Horseshoe area. We were looking at the value of permitting, the cost to get a building permit, after going through things like rezoning, getting a building permit, waiting a certain amount of time to get the permit. You pay a certain amount in that process, and it varies very widely. In the aggregate, the delays in getting building permits, the higher costs of building permits, and opposition, particularly from councils and community groups, to new housing in their area—the not-in-my-backyard kind of opposition—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Snob zoning.

Dr. Kenneth Green: All of this raises the cost of building new housing units and suppresses the supply. We know that when you have a suppressed supply and you have a high demand, prices go up even higher than they would if you had enough housing to meet demand.

We've argued that communities need to look around at their neighbours and normalize themselves with regard to how much it costs to get a building permit, how much time it takes to get a building permit, how certain you are to get one when you start down the road, when you start putting money into the process. They need to figure out ways to compete with some of their lower-cost, more-efficient jurisdictions if they do indeed want housing in their jurisdictions, in their urban cores. If they really want more development, they have to be competitive with their adjacent communities.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Here again we have this example of mayors and municipalities that are driving up the cost of housing through this insane red tape and restrictions on building, and then coming to the federal taxpayer and demanding more money for housing because housing's too expensive.

The Chair: I'm afraid we're over time there.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Anyway, it's a circular problem.

The Chair: Yes.

We have to close it there. I've gotten several notes from my colleagues that we clearly did not have enough time today to really delve into questions that we needed to with each of you.

For the record, I'm going to suggest that if there are additional questions from any of you for these witnesses, have them to the clerk by the end of this week. If we could then distribute those questions to the appropriate witnesses for a written submission, that would be very much appreciated so that we'll get a more holistic experience with this.

I really do want to thank each and every one of you, and all those who came out to witness today. I think we've now determined how many people we can get into this space. We do have some committee business to deal with, so that's why we have to cut this off now.

I'm going to suspend for just a few moments. I'm going to ask those of you who don't need to be here to move fairly quickly to the lobby so that we can come back in a very brief time, maybe two minutes, to wrap up our committee business.

Thank you very much to everybody and all those who made today possible.

• (1250)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1250)

The Chair: Could we come back to order, please? That mass exodus happened a lot faster than I expected.

I'd just remind those who are travelling to Winnipeg today that our flight is leaving at 7 p.m. Please take your own cabs. The last time, because of the timing, we arranged for the cabs, but today I think you have more than enough time to get back to your hotel or apartments and make your way to the airport.

Next week, on Tuesday, February 21, we're going to have witnesses on poverty reduction strategies; on February 23, committee business; on March 7, witnesses from Kuujuaq, to make up for us not getting there; March 9 is to be determined; and March 10 is when we're hoping to travel to Toronto to make up for missing that.

Now I will turn it over to MP Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you very much.

As you know, MP Mark Warawa has been away, but in March 2016, he put forward a motion. I just want to read a statement from Mark before I begin.

He writes, “In my role as the Official Opposition Critic for Seniors I have met with many stakeholders and all of them are calling for the government to create a National Seniors Framework to help centralize and address the concerns of Canadian seniors. Never before has our country faced this type of demographic change, and globally, we have seen the effects of a lack of government planning for this shift. I call on my colleagues in this committee to support my motion, and begin this study at the earliest convenience.”

Putting forward the motion, the motion is:

That the Committee conduct a study on a Canadian “National Seniors Framework”;

That the study focus on the percentage of the Canadian population that are seniors and the need to prepare for this quickly changing demographic;

That the study be conducted immediately following the current study on “poverty reduction strategies”;

That the study consist of at least ten (10) sessions; and, that the findings be reported to the House.

As I indicated previously, this was a motion that Mark Warawa brought forward in March 2016. It has been outstanding for almost a year. We've done so much work on poverty, and I think this is a great segue because we have seen that there is definitely a tie. When we're looking at seniors, there has to be a next step for our senior population.

Thank you.

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you, Karen.

Dan, did you want to respond?

Mr. Dan Ruimy: I think we all agree that a national seniors strategy is something that should be studied. However—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Good. Stop right there.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Dan Ruimy: However—

The Chair: Actually, sorry, I would remind members, just so you know, we are in public. We're not in camera.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: He takes that back then.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: With the hooting and hollering, I just wanted to make sure you guys knew we weren't in camera.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: No. I would have done it either way.

The Chair: I know we're a fun-loving bunch.

Go ahead, Dan.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: There's no need to take it back.

Currently, motion M-106 is before the House. It calls on our committee to study a national seniors strategy. The first hour of reading is on February 24. I'm not sure why we would try to do a motion at this point in time when we have one that's already before the House.

At this point, I won't be supporting the motion, mainly because we have motion M-106 before the House.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Okay.

I bring this motion forward because it has been outstanding for 10 months, and it's looking into the future and what we need to do. As I indicated, going from poverty into seniors is a good option for us as we're moving forward. Also, once again, 10 months ago, my colleague put this down on the table, so it is a very important thing for us as the Conservative Party because we recognize that in the future one in two individuals will be over the age of 65. We have to start preparing a strategy. I recognize that you're looking at a Liberal motion compared with the committee motion that was put forward, but I'm just putting it back on the table.

Thank you.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

Bob?

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I'd like a recorded vote.

The Chair: It will be a recorded vote.

(Motion negated: nays 5; yeas 4)

The Chair: Before we adjourn, are there any questions about travel? Fingers crossed, we'll have a bit more success in getting to where we need to get this week.

Madam Boutin-Sweet.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Could you send us the list of trips by email? There are a few NDP members on the committee.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, we can do that.

Are there any further discussions or questions?

This meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>