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COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Thursday, May 24, 2007

Committee Room 1

National Council On Welfare

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COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

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[Mr. Stephen McNeil was replaced by Mr. Wayne Gaudet.]
[Hon. Len Goucher was replaced by Hon. Karen Casey.]

In Attendance:

Ms. Rhonda Neatt
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

National Council On Welfare

Mr. John Murphy
Past-Chair

Ms. Gail MacDougall
Nova Scotia Representative

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, MAY 24, 2007

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN

Ms. Marilyn More

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm going to call to order the Standing Committee on Community Services. Today our topic is on poverty and we have with us representatives of the National Council of Welfare - the immediate past chairman, John Murphy; and our current Nova Scotia representative, Gail MacDougall. So welcome to the committee this morning, thank you very much for coming.

We'll start with introductions from the committee members and Gordie, perhaps we'll start with you.

[The committee members and witnesses introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So I think you are prepared to do an introductory presentation and then we'll have some questions and clarification perhaps to ask of you.

MR. JOHN MURPHY: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. First off let me tell you, I'm a bit deaf. Are these things working?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: They are for recording purposes only, not to amplify sound.

MR. MURPHY: That's what I thought. I'll speak loud - I speak loud anyway, but I need to hear when we get around to questions and so on a little louder from committee members.

The National Council of Welfare, which I am not chairman now, I was for nine years, is an independent body that advises the federal government on poverty issues in the country and specifically, the Minister of Human Resource Development, and that name changed over the nine years that I was there, several times. The job of the council was to advise the minister. Ministers in the past have often met with the council on a regular basis - I used to meet with the ministers along with staff from the secretariat to talk about the particular issues around poverty. We look at the bigger picture, of course, but we'll zero in on Nova Scotia.

I am going to give you a bit of a presentation that talks about the bigger picture in Canada and where we sit and some of the things we might look at as solutions.

You may remember back in 1989 - and you hear this all the time, of course - that the eradication of poverty was put before the House of Commons and all Parties voted on that to make sure that eradication would take place by 2000. The question would be, where are we today? Back then it was somewhere in the vicinity of 14.9 per cent or 15 per cent and in 2007 we are somewhere in the vicinity of 15 per cent for Canada, maybe 4,900,000 people living below the poverty line. In your province - we'll talk more about that later, but not a lot has changed. Nothing has really changed over the period of time that we said we would eradicate poverty. There are about 1.2 million children, one in six, living in poverty in this country. There are 1,700,000 people on welfare, 500,000 of those are children.

Just to give you an idea - and I don't want to throw out too many statistics - for instance, if you were a lone parent with one child, living in this province, you would roughly get \$12,900 a year on social assistance and your Child Tax Benefit. The poverty line or the LICO as we call it - which is the only poverty line we have, we have other lines being looked at - for that single parent with one child would be about \$22,000. So you have a picture of where that person on welfare is living.

Poverty Profile, which is one of our documents that we put out on a regular basis, and Welfare Incomes, which is kind of our bread and butter - they are fairly large documents, but we put those out every year and it gives a picture of what poverty looks like, what welfare looks like and it is the best stuff that is done in Canada at this point in time. In that Poverty Profile many people living in poverty are people who have earned half of their income as we would want them to do and as they obviously want to do, so there is a million people living in that vicinity with half of their income coming from paid income. We are not just talking about people who are on welfare or in other situations.

What has happened in Canada is that we have always been doing a band-aid approach. We fix a little here, we fix a little there, we give a little more on the side of the

Child Tax Benefit, provinces - and I'm not picking on any particular province or territory. They are pretty much all the same - they either let the thing erode and it drops down further and/or people cut back on welfare so that people who are living on welfare and living in poverty never get ahead. I just want to give you an idea, for instance, in Nova Scotia a single - no, let's give you a lone parent again. The time that it was the highest in this province was in 1991 and at that time it was \$15,400. That's what the lone parent with one child got - \$15,400. In 2005, that figure had dropped to \$12,900.

So we are not keeping track of where we're going for poor people; we're just going behind. That band-aid approach has never worked and we need to look at a bigger strategy. For instance, I recently just delivered a paper with the Nova Scotia teachers association on youth poverty, and under age 15 the poverty rate is around 19 per cent and between 19 and 24 years of age, it is 20 per cent. That's our young people. Again, there's no strategy in this country for young people.

The much higher rates, as you may be well aware, are recent immigrants, visible minorities, Aboriginal people, and people living with disabilities. So those people are in even more dire straits in this country. The number of working-age people, working-age singles, living in the deepest of poverty - just to give that again, working-age singles living in poverty - has tripled since 1989. Back then, in 1989, there were 162,000 people living in poverty; in 2003-04, that had risen to 552,000. So things have gotten worse in this country as we move along.

I often think of what we might do if we were in a position to raise poverty and raise that issue of poverty to be a priority. Remember what has gone on in health care over the last number of elections, billions of dollars have been thrown into the health care system. Why? Because people screamed, governments of all stripes responded. If we had that kind of response for people who are living in poverty - because poverty is not just dollars and cents, it is people being excluded from society. People who are living in poverty are behind closed doors.

We often don't understand and I often don't understand what poverty really is because I haven't experienced it, though I have seen a lot of it. What happens is, people get behind closed doors and they get excluded from health care, they get excluded from education, they get excluded from training, they get excluded from all kinds of things that you and I take for granted because they're just not in the business of knowing what to do and how to do it and the motivation often is not there as well.

Their kids are being excluded. I remember telling some groups recently that these young people who are living in poverty don't do what you and I do. They don't play the sports, they don't have somebody stay overnight, they don't have a lot of those, so they have learned to be silent often, and sometimes not so silent as we're aware of in the corrections system. That exclusion is so much a part of what poverty is all about.

What do we need? I think it is a depressing picture what I have presented to you. I think it is actually morally disgraceful, really, what has happened in this country, but I think that a strategy is not just a dream. In the United Kingdom - I just going to give you some quick examples - they said that by 2010 they would have child poverty cut by half and that by 2020 they would eradicate poverty; that is in the United Kingdom.

In Ireland, back in 1997 they began an action plan against poverty and social exclusion and they started there with a poverty rate of 15 per cent - actually 15.1 per cent in 1994 - and by 2001-2002, they had brought that down to 5.2 per cent. They did something - they went after those who were in the deepest of poverty, but they did something and proved that looking at a strategy for a country is certainly achievable and it is not a dream.

[9:15 a.m.]

In Quebec, we know - and of course you know the Nordic countries are in the same boat as the two previous examples I gave you. We can take a look in our own country, in terms of where strategies have taken place and Quebec is one of them. For the strategy in Quebec, they said they'll have the lowest poverty rate among industrialized societies by 2013. They have gone so far, of course, as to write it into legislation so that when governments change, the poverty strategy remains the same, because it is written in their legislation.

Also, Newfoundland and Labrador - the poorest province in the country - has taken on a strategy for reduction of poverty. What have they done? They had the leadership and they had the vision and they brought together all the departments - housing, education, social services, whatever - and they brought them all together saying we are going to build into our budgets and into our fabric a society and - I think in 10 or 15 years, somewhere in that vicinity - we'll have the lowest poverty rate in the country.

That took a vision. That took Danny Williams to say, we are going to do this, we're going to bring all those departments. We met, as a national council - Gail and I and others - with one of their people who was a deputy minister. I am thinking that individual had a lot of influence on Danny Williams and also the woman who was the coordinator of that program. We saw what they did, they had targets built into their budgets. For instance, they would say that by next year, we'll have more social housing, next year we'll have less people on welfare, next year we'll have more people taking training. In each of those items in that budget, there was a figure and they had to meet that figure.

I'll talk a little bit more about that, because then the next step, of course, was they had to be responsible back to the people of Newfoundland, where they're accountable on achieving their goals. They did a consultation, by the way, before this all happened, with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We have some material for you on all of that issue.

As I indicated, that National Council might well be pretty depressed about what you're hearing me tell you today. Not so, our cup is always half full - I know my cup has always been half full. You wouldn't be there trying to do something about poverty in this country if your cup wasn't half full.

The council has been putting out a lot of documents. I've told you about two but we've done things on the justice system, we did one on the cost of poverty-what does it cost to have all of these people living in poverty, not contributing. Believe me, most people want a job and they want to contribute, but you understand that lots of people can't get off welfare because they're frightened of losing maybe their Pharmacare card, their thing on housing, because if they went back to work at minimum wage, which doesn't get you over the poverty line, you are worse off.

So we, as a council, changed our strategy back - I think it was in December. Not that we're not going to continue putting out documents, but we did an online questionnaire and we thought we'd get around 2,000 people answering that questionnaire, we got over 5,000 people, over 420 organizations in this country. So what we were looking at was not, what does the National Council of Welfare think we should do about poverty in this country, but what do Canadians think we should do about poverty in this country?

We got some really wonderful answers back. I won't go over the questionnaire, we have a copy of it for you, but it was very telling what went on. I'll just tell you a couple of items that came out of that questionnaire and I want to tell you, too, that we had a hard copy questionnaire that we did with people living in shelters. All the shelters across Canada joined together under one of our members, actually, who helped organize that from Montreal and at night they filled out these questionnaires on their own. So we heard from poor people, and not only those who may be better off.

The respondents in this questionnaire strongly agreed - and that was about 94 per cent - that government should put a higher priority in fighting poverty and they strongly agreed - at 92 per cent - that the federal government should take a leadership role in this. They also strongly agreed - at 90 per cent - that the anti-poverty strategy should specifically address the poorest of Canadians on the action side of this front.

The overall top-ranking priority for income security was a guaranteed annual income and that was right across the demographic groups that answered this questionnaire. The most important social service priority turned out to be affordable housing for people. So those were some of the instances, but what we are going to continually need is to hear from Canadians and get Canadians understanding what other Canadians are going through, in my view, on the situation that exists with so many of our fellow Canadians.

We took this questionnaire and our document and we did a press conference in January; we also met with some senators and MPs to discuss this. Obviously what we are looking for are people who are going to be champions for all of this. Just to give you the four quick points, if I can, of what the cornerstone of a workable strategy would be, what

is required - and we're going to give you documents on that - is territories, provinces and the federal government can no longer be pointing to jurisdictions.

Poverty is the concern of all of us and we need to address that, we need to have the Nova Scotia Government, all of the governments across the country, including territories and the federal government, working together because nobody wants this stigma of poverty, this unjustness of poverty that exists in this country. So those four cornerstones of a workable strategy for Canada are: (1) a national anti-poverty strategy with long-term vision and measurable targets and timetables; (2) a plan of action and a budget that coordinates initiatives within and across governments and other partners; (3) a government accountability structure for ensuring results and consulting with Canadians in the design, implementation and evaluation of the actions that will affect them; and lastly (4) a set of priority indicators that will be used to plan, monitor, change and assess progress. So those are the four cornerstones of a strategy that we have put forward as a National Council and we have been hearing a lot about it.

When I was chair, I did a lot of publicity work. When we put out some of these documents, I might work all day long and do some 30 interviews across the country talking about poverty issues. I must say that I have always gotten a wonderful reception - because I got syndicated by CBC and others - by people who were interviewing me. I always said when I come to a group - and I do a lot of group stuff now, but I'm not sure how much more I will be doing of this - what I tell people is at the end of the day you then become the spokesman, you then become the word, you then become the people who will promote how we can do something about poverty in this country by telling others. The radio stations and television work that I did, other people heard all of that and what they did at the end of the day was hopefully went and told others. That priority that I talk about is getting the poverty issues higher priority in this country, so we have some action can take place. If it stays behind closed doors we'll continue, and may meet, in years to come, with the same kind of results. I don't believe that will be the case; I believe this government and all governments want and will handle this issue of poverty in a just manner.

Madam Chair, I think maybe I've gone over my time, I'm not sure.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That's quite all right. You may be aware - I just want to give you a little bit of context of our interest. This has been fascinating, I think, to us because as a committee - and we've had various members on it over the last two years - we've been very, very motivated to push for an anti-poverty or poverty reduction strategy in Nova Scotia. There are so many different groups working sort of side by side but not necessarily coordinating their efforts. So we're making small progress in Nova Scotia but I think we need that coordinating framework that you've been talking about.

We've sponsored two Forums on Poverty in the Red Room and received information that, quite frankly I think, shocked a lot of us. We thought we were making more progress than we actually are, in terms of reducing the poverty and suffering in Nova

Scotia. So we're looking, as a committee, at how we can support a more proactive approach to these issues, similar to what your council is doing.

I'm just wondering, Gail, you're currently on the council, whether you might want to tell us a little bit about - has there been any take-up by the federal government in providing a leadership that our provincial initiatives might be able to fit into?

MS. GAIL MACDOUGALL: I think that the role of the council has been to do research and inform government. We have done the research, we forward the information, and then it goes into the government and it is up to the government then to decide whether or not they will listen to or accept the information that we give. They receive it, we will see the outcome when we see more discussion. I believe federally there has been some discussion by some members of this.

At the reception we had, a lot of Members of Parliament and a couple of Cabinet Ministers came to receive our report, Solving Poverty - I have copies for everyone - and when we reported back on the questionnaire. So I think there is interest. I think it is a huge task and our role has been to provide information and I think to encourage discussion and I think, hopefully, to share a sense of optimism that yes, we believe something can be done.

Our document outlines the ingredients that we think will be part of any effective strategy drawn on international and national experiences of different provinces. I think each level of government has to tailor-make a strategy that is going to fit the needs of their own province. There seem to be common elements to successful strategies and those are lessons learned I think that each group can take. I don't know if that responds.

MR. MURPHY: I just might add that because this particular federal government has had its five priorities and they've been seeking to attain those and so on, that there's been little or no talk about really social policy at that level. We used to meet with ministers on a very regular basis but our particular minister of that day came to one meeting - I suspect only because the priorities were somewhere else, though we apprised her of everything we were doing and gave her an opportunity to meet with us and did all of that sort of thing, it just didn't happen so you really didn't get a picture of an interest. We did have some interest in Parliament, as a whole, but as I say, the priorities were somewhere else at that point in time.

[9:30 a.m.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So I'm hearing from you that we shouldn't wait for someone else outside the province to take leadership on this, we need to continue ourselves.

MS. MACDOUGALL: Absolutely, the needs are too great here. I worked in Community Services and Health for many years as a social worker and I know from my own professional work experience that the need is great. The lack of coordination is painful when you are looking at working with an individual who is dealing with the system. People

are working to improve that, but there seems to be the bits-and-bites kind of approach, as John said.

We have seen a number of interesting initiatives come from Nova Scotia but that whole comprehensive sense - what we heard from people in Newfoundland was that there must be political will to address this issue and that it doesn't belong to one Party or another. The political will to address the income situation and issues of social exclusion and housing has to be comprehensive and go beyond individual political Parties and agendas. If it isn't that, then if government changes, then you know better than I do - I have only been an observer working in this community - that other priorities come in and we lose that. That is what is interesting about Quebec - they actually enacted legislation and I have a copy of the legislation; you can get it on their Web site in English. You can get the info on the strategy in Newfoundland from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Interesting questions for you to ponder are, do we look at legislation that puts in place a set of legislative requirements that we will do certain things in certain time frames? Can you look at an all-Party or non-partisan strategy and initiative that will live beyond specific governments? I think this is an issue for this province to have a look at.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: You said you had a copy also of your costs of poverty research.

MS. MACDOUGALL: All of our documents are available on our Web site - they can be downloaded or you can write to the council and they will be sent to you free of charge. I did bring our Poverty Profile 2002 and 2003, these always come out a year or two late because of the time it takes to do the research and two copies of Welfare Incomes 2005. I will leave these for you and the committee members and you can certainly go to our Web site and contact us for as many copies as you need.

MR. MURPHY: That document, Cost of Poverty, can be gotten. It's about three years old but it is still very relevant. I will give each of the members my card, but in there is how to get hold of the council, et cetera.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. We will now open up for questions. Keith.

MR. KEITH COLWELL: First of all I want to thank you for coming this morning, this is a very important topic. I know in my present riding, the riding I had before, and I think every provincial riding in this province - I don't think there is one single MLA that says they don't have the problems you are talking about. It is difficult sometimes to work with families who are having such a problem that, where do you start? That is a big issue.

I have always thought, as I have gone through this in the many years I have been in politics and tried to help people - sometimes successfully and sometimes not, just because the system wasn't set up for individuals - that we don't spend enough time really looking at the individual. Sometimes I have helped people with the smallest little thing that has

made a huge difference in their lives. It may have been something as simple now as a bus pass to get back and forth to a job that the person can simply not afford to buy to start a job. From there they go to an on the job training situation and they can afford a bus pass and they can do the other things that they need to do to get started. The other thing may be some simple training, some pretty basic stuff that there's not funding for.

I find that here in the province anyway, what I've seen is there are some really good programs, but the programs are so global and they don't fit the individual. They might almost fit and because they almost fit means they don't fit and when they don't fit it means that they can't do this one simple thing that may make all the difference in their lives.

Have you had any thoughts around that individual approach to people? The global one is very important - I'm not saying it isn't very important - but also individual things that may help people and some leeway in governments that they can. If you get a social worker or some other organization in government that would have some leeway to say to that person, you need a training program and if you get this program, it means you can get a job and you get a job and break that cycle. Has there been some work in that area?

MR. MURPHY: Well, what you're saying is sort of an individualized program and of course that comes with working with a particular social worker, but you've got to have a broad base to be able to do that and then social workers and professionals who are out there working in the field need to tailor that to the individual's needs.

That's always the problem. What has to happen is that if people are going to get out of poverty and get to work, then they need a number of aids to get there - bus passes, Pharmacare, et cetera. They need a time when the social assistance will stay with them while they're working because if they're working for the minimum wage, they haven't risen above the poverty line. So they need help to move in that direction.

I think that is very important, but you got to put the whole picture together, because when you do the band-aid approach, some people get help and some people don't. The rates of the use of social assistance, for instance, has gone down. Has it gone down because people have gone out and are working, or has it gone down because the criteria is harder to get? I think it is the latter but nonetheless, that individualized approach has to be seen because that's how you visualize and see what poverty is all about and the needs of people who are living in poverty and trying to pull that all together.

MS. MACDOUGALL: I think often our first encounter with those living in poverty is on an individual basis. Walking here this morning, I went by three or four people who were sitting there looking for some money for food. There is a real reminder to people that there are people in need.

I'm sure in your work, you get calls from constituents who are looking for their individual situation and as a social worker who has practised in this province for a long time, I know that often the connection to the system is through the individual. Then you

get to see it through their eyes and perhaps see the barriers that people encounter when attempting to work with systems that can be fragmented and programs that aren't coordinated.

In the short term, those are the day-to-day barriers people encounter. In the long term, we have to look at the system that creates and sustains the inequities. So I mean, I think while we address these issues, there are short and long terms things that we have to look at; one is the case-by-case individual path through the system and learn from that, in terms of what the gateways and what the barriers are.

On the other hand, we know that there are systemic inequities and there are oppressed people living in our society and there are people who are marginalized because of gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, et cetera. We need to recognize the inequities and create a system that is going to pull together and ensure we have fewer people living in socially excluded positions within society.

I always struggled with this when I was in practice because I would spend hours negotiating a bed for a child to sleep overnight when, in fact, the issue - and the child and their family and myself - we were caught up in the individual dealing with the system, when, in fact, within the system there needed to be significant thought and revision and coordination, which I know the government has been working on.

Your connection is through the individual and it's difficult. It is eye-opening to see the barriers that system designers create a system that works from one perspective, but when you're actually walking with people through it, you see the barriers. I think it was June Caldwell who wrote about that - she helped a young woman who was a single mom. She helped her get into training and that was good and she had income assistance, but the young woman's day began - she had a child who needed infant day care and one for toddlers in two different places; the bus pass, she had to get up early in the morning, take the baby to the infant care, take the bus to take the child to the toddler care, take the bus to go to her training program, reverse the whole thing at night, come home and cook dinner, spend time with the children, put them down for the night and then do her homework and studies. The barriers - this poor young woman was overwhelmed by the demands made on her. From my perspective, we have to look at all the pieces that were there but it didn't work. Why?

MR. COLWELL: That's the sort of thing I'm talking about and you see this happen and not everybody that I deal with, and you have far more experience at this than I'll ever have, but not everybody is a candidate for training or whatever the case may be, for whatever reason. It could be because the family is large or whatever, and that's not for me to judge or anyone to judge, I mean that's the individual's choice.

In the cases, I can think of one case I worked with and a gentleman came to me one time and he said, look, I want to go to this training program. The training program was a very, very difficult training program and he didn't have his Grade 12. He had a family, he

was on social assistance, and I thought to myself at first, this guy is crazy. Well, I can tell you, four years later he finished the program, he started his own business and today is very successful and never will be on the system again, ever. So that was the drive that he had. But I can tell you that if I didn't intervene as an MLA at that time and put a lot of pressure on Community Services, that couldn't have happened, and they did not pay for his training. He took student loans out and paid for his training. He had to leave home for two years to do that, but in the meantime, Community Services left his family in a situation where they would look after them, and since then the family has done well.

Now this is not something that will happen over and over again, but I still think we have to look at the individual. I think that the case workers - I know they have tremendous workloads and that is a problem in itself. But there has to be some way that through the intake system or through the process, the individuals can be looked at and say okay, what programs do we have in place to help that individual, and if the program isn't there, because we can take one person at a time and help them through the system and get them to where they want to be in life, working or whatever the case may be - again, to me it is a personal choice - and see some hope and see some things they can do. A lot of people I deal with aren't on social services - two people in the family, working minimum wage and struggling every day. They don't have the drug care of someone on community services, they don't have eye prescriptions, don't have dental care - all the things that they just simply cannot afford. Those are the people, too, who we have to help and there's really no structure to help them. We could help them, maybe, to get some more training in the job they do, so they can make a better income and make it affordable, make ways to do this.

We've got a shortage of trained people in this country and it is going to get worse and worse, yet we've got a whole group of people who we're talking about today who would fill those jobs very adequately, if they had the opportunity to do so.

So, in the strategies that you've worked for- and I know and I really, truly appreciate the work you're doing with this because this is very, very important to our country and to the people of our country. Has there been emphasis put on that any place or have you seen any government do that sort of thing to help the families and move them forward out of this cycle?

[9:45 a.m.]

MR. MURPHY: Well, I'll jump in just to say that it happens, that's for sure. I think it happens in individual cases, you know. Maybe not all people are treated equally with that, but I know that certainly some of the members of our council report back to us that in B.C. or in Newfoundland or where ever, that those individualized things do happen, no question about it.

I don't want to be pessimistic and say that some of that doesn't, but it needs to be translated into the bigger picture so that what we do is treat everybody fairly and give everybody the opportunity. I'm of the opinion that most people want to work, but we have

to find a way and means of getting that group of people back into the workforce so they can contribute and they can get out behind the closed doors. They can contribute like the rest of us and feel worthwhile and, of course, at the end of the day, involve themselves in the income tax system so the country becomes better off at the end of the day.

It is a long-term vision, but can it be handled? I think so. We talk about the services that people use like the food banks - the president of the Canadian Association of Food Banks met with us not long ago. Back in October-November, I think, they did what they call a one-day looking at how many people use food banks in Canada and it was 800,000 people in that particular month of October-November. That's a lot of people, when we think of food banks that came into place as a temporary thing. I happen to be Chair of a food bank in the Valley where I come from, and I've never seen the statistics go down and I don't think anybody else has ever seen the statistics go down in food banks. They're collecting more and more information and a lot of that information is telling you that the people we're talking about are people who are working, the working poor.

We're saying - I don't know what the minimum wage here is, I think it is \$7.50 or \$7.60, whatever - but to get to the poverty line is about \$10 an hour. I've heard governments over the years say, we can't handle that, we'll lose jobs, productivity will go down, et cetera. Well, there was a study done and I gave it to Mark Parent recently. In the U.S., 600 economists got together and they looked at the minimum wage, because the minimum wage in the U.S. - the overall federal one - is somewhere in the vicinity of \$5.50 or something like that. Among those 600 economists, there were four Nobel Peace Prize economists and they said that it would not hurt productivity, would not hurt job losses, companies wouldn't move away. We've been saying, as governments across the country, that's what will happen, so there's some myths here somewhere, somebody has not got it right. Now do you jump to \$10? No. Maybe you have to do it gradually, but not by 10 cents, you know you'll never get there. You need to move forward. These are some of the things that are barriers.

For instance - you tell me if you want me to stop - the E.I. system. Back in the early 1990's, 80 per cent of the people who were unemployed were using the E.I. system. In Toronto last year, 27 per cent of that population were now using the E.I. system. For Canada alone, it is roughly between 35 and 40 per cent. So the cutbacks have come, the criteria is harder, et cetera.

There was a scheme that 80 per cent of the people who weren't working were using it back in the 1990's - now it is down to 40 per cent across the country. But I just looked at Toronto, because we just recently got a report from their group, that 27 per cent of the population was using the E.I. system. So we've been cutting back, cutting back and I'll just stop there, but to say that often what happens is governments - and I'm not looking at you guys at all - as a whole look at people who are living in poverty, living on welfare and they figure if they squeeze them hard enough they will go back to work. There's not a shred of evidence that is true, for all of the obvious reasons that some of you have already stated and some of the things that we have said. To think that's the answer, to squeeze people

hard enough that they'll go back to work, because who would want to live on half the poverty line and even below that.

The statistics are showing more and more that that depth of poverty is coming back to haunt us, that people are in that depth of poverty for five and six years, so they have not broken the mould and may not break the mould. They are raising children in that same environment of exclusion and lack of income - anyway, I get carried away.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I don't actually have anyone on the list so I am going to jump . . .

MR. COLWELL: Mr. Glavine was . . .

MR. GLAVINE: I'll pass to the other Party if our time is up.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well Gordie, then I'm going to ask a question and then Leo.

MR. GORDON GOSSE: This is a very good discussion this morning but the national strategy - I remember, I think, back in the 1960s here in this country, they said that we couldn't have a national health care system. We have a national health care system now, and remember we couldn't take care of our senior citizens - now we have a Canada Pension Plan. What is the main stumbling block that you see why we don't have a national strategy for poverty reduction?

MR. MURPHY: I think that we don't have the will at this point in time; we don't have the leadership which is required. Governments often haven't worked very well together because of other issues jurisdictionally, but what is needed is that jurisdiction to disappear and then that strategy can work. You said, we can't wait for the federal government, yes. Well, I think what the provincial governments, territorial governments need to get to the federal government and say, we are interested, we are working on a strategy in our own province but we think what has to happen is a national strategy has to take place. Often, the funding mechanisms are available at the federal level where they may not be so at the provincial and territorial level. So it is that will that needs to happen.

MR. GOSSE: The will in Europe is - I remember some of the stuff that I read in the last week or so that was handed to us - that 25 European Union countries have come together to work on this problem. We have countries in Europe that are coming together yet we have our country, Canada, that can't get provinces and territories together to develop a strategy. You talked earlier about 1990, the UN declaration for the elimination of poverty, and all of those different things. I worked in the system for a long time with young people and saw the desperate needs of young people today in community services, but it seems as government changes - and you alluded to that fact - criteria change for people who are in the system. So now we have a third generation of somebody who is in the system.

I can actually track it back, from where I am from in Cape Breton, to the third generation right now, grandmother, mother and now the daughter and actually with some I see the fourth generation. Now that I am in the position as an elected official, what can I do as an elected official? I do see it on a daily basis where I come from and I worked in the field for 15 years at a youth centre giving programs and feeding kids breakfast programs and lunch programs and all of that. I always wondered what can I do now as an elected official to try to move this agenda forward.

We have had two-day forums on strategies on poverty and we listened and I think everybody at the table is a good listener, but now we have to do something more because we see the stats have not changed. Now we see the association - with the Nunn Report and everything else - with poverty and crime. We spend a little bit now in providing constructive programs and constructive ways of getting people off the welfare system and it saves us later in the Justice Department - not only within the country but within the province. The four departments - Health, Justice, Education and Community Services - should all be working together on a strategy for the elimination of poverty and targeting these young people. It is said that some of us in the Legislature who are educators can actually tell what young people in the classrooms, as early Grades 1, 2 and 3 - which direction these young people are heading when they come to school hungry and they come to school aggressive in their behaviour, with learning disabilities and drug use, alcohol and all of those things.

I read the material - Ireland has a great program. The best I saw in Canada was in Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador, as you alluded to earlier. Where would you rate us in Nova Scotia in that timetable along the 10 provinces and territories in affordable housing issues?

We always change the criteria. I have been saying recently about affordable housing, we haven't built a unit. We built a total of 570 where other provinces have built 1,500, so why are we different here? Why is that program not accessed here in affordable housing? In Cape Breton, 83 per cent of seniors living in poverty, what are we doing to eliminate that? We see everything else rising around them, their co-pay has gone up \$46 this year, I know that for a fact. What have we done to help that? How do we keep seniors in their homes? We have cut-off rates, should we look at maybe changing those cut-offs for grants for seniors living in their homes? Should we look at the level of income before they can access those grants, the level of income should rise so people can access that? I just want to know your feelings and thoughts on what we can do as Nova Scotians and where we sit in Canada?

MS. MACDOUGALL: You raise some interesting points and I think one of the things that is really interesting that you touched on was the fact that overall in the country the poverty rates for seniors have diminished - that is the one group where there has been significant change. That can go back to the national and provincial programs that were put in place back in the 1960s. We have a health care system. If we look at the problems individually they become overwhelming. You touched on so many points there.

I'm drawn to the work of the National Council because it gives us an opportunity to step back from the individual and look at a vision and an approach. I think without vision and an understanding of what each citizen should have or be entitled to in terms of issues of housing, health, education, social exclusion - everyone should have a place. There is a philosophical thing here and I think that when we did our survey, people from all ages, all demographics and all socio-economic groups voluntarily gave us feedback, I think it showed us that people want to be involved in the dialogue. We didn't use a PR firm to go out and solicit, no telemarketer at 7:00 p.m. saying, we have a question, none of that - this was strictly word of mouth. I think our sense is that there is considerable interest in these issues - and John mentioned that.

The fragmentation of service - a human being is an integrated thing, we are an entity and all of these things. We have many needs and we offer many things. The way social services - and I have been involved for 40 years and I'm speaking personally right at the moment - we have partialized people. If you need a house, we'll try to get a house, we'll try to do this or that. So the services have arisen to address individual needs when I think it is time to do some high level thinking to set a direction and an understanding of what citizens are entitled to, what kinds of social security, health and educational services are available and how best to mobilize the resources that we have.

We live in a province that does not have deep pockets - I've seen this. I used to go to Ontario as a social worker and hear their anguish about what they didn't have and I would get so frustrated because I'd think, geez, you ought to work in Nova Scotia. I understand we don't have all the money we want in this province, I know it very well, but I think the challenge is in when we look at an anti-poverty strategy or legislation, it makes a commitment to certain things. I think that is what is extremely important, because I think that what we heard from the public was that they want a vision, they wanted direction and in the pursuit of individual needs, I think maybe we have lost a vision. We are well intended and we want to help people and we want to create societies, but what is that going to look like? What does it look like in 2007?

[10:00 a.m.]

In the 1960s when people didn't have - after the war, there were not a lot of social programs, they were created to meet a need. What is going to meet the need now? Things have changed, things haven't changed, so it is this kind of thing. Then we have a direction, if you have \$100,000 or you have \$100 million, you know where it is going to go and you are reflecting the values that are important to the people of this province.

The national piece, if we're working nationally, is extremely important because so many programs intersect. What happens in one federal program - for example, the Child Tax Benefit. Initially a number of provinces, almost all, clawed back the tax or used them, allocated part of it for other programming. It wasn't well coordinated. I'm so heartened, as a citizen of Nova Scotia, that the discussion is going on, but someone has got to take - we can't do it for you at the council. We can share our information, but what we're

hearing and what we're seeing is that, in Quebec, it was a collective that really pushed government and engaged the population.

The question for you is, is it the role of the citizenry or is it the role of government? You raised it, how is going to move here? How is to going to move forward? What is our vision? Can we, as a government, set a long-term strategy that builds on the things that the successful elements we know from elsewhere are going to move us forward? I think that is the question. I'm responding a bit and going on, but that is what I am taking from what you said. I think it is a time for vision and that is why I'm heartened by the work of the council because it is saying it is a workable national strategy. We have lessons learned from others areas, we don't need to duplicate those. What we need to do is see where it takes us and how it translates into the lives of people here.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Leo and then Karen.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: John and Gail, thank you for being here today and I know, John, I've heard you speak on this issue a number of times before and certainly you have things well documented. In one of the areas among the statistical profile that you presented, there are disturbing trends here when you see the poverty deepening. There is a whole number of areas, if we take a look. Take for example, working aged singles - from 1989 to close to the present time, to see that triple in numbers. Are we looking at something going on in the country around the structure of work, the greater tendency to part time, to casual, to lower benefits? Is this part of a societal trend that is truly impacting and again, especially on the single parent family? We have 11,400 such families in Nova Scotia with just a mother or a father working. The first part is around some thoughts on that deepening trend, but then is it that type of statistic that you think we need to target and say, in this area we'd like to half that number, we'd like to see that mother and child, that father and two children be able to provide a stronger living for them? I'll give you that in two parts there.

MR. MURPHY: I think you have phrased it very well. What is happening in the country is we are often diluting the safety net and that has been going on for some time. Where you have success is in places like Sweden. We talk about the single mom with one child and so on, somewhere in the vicinity of 35 to 40 per cent of that group of people, in this country, are living below the poverty line; in Sweden, 3 per cent. What did they do? Well, they shored up all of these things that you mentioned, Leo, to make sure that people had access to these things.

It is often an understanding of, where do you draw the line and how do you change your priorities? All of you know, as well as we do, that the gap between the rich and the poor is growing all the time, so there are more and more people.

A recent study done by the Policy Alternative group said that some 45 per cent of the population in Canada are one to two paycheques away from dropping into poverty. Now that's a huge number. We have to look differently and I compliment Nova Scotia. If you are aware, or not aware, the Canadian average in 2005 of people living below the

poverty line is 15.3 per cent. Nova Scotia has dropped below that Canadian average to 13.2 per cent. If I came with the statistics I had in 2003 or 2004, Nova Scotia was up over the average, so something has happened and I'm not sure what it is, but things have improved a bit.

Now, other jurisdictions or other groups of people - and we'll give you this document - the elderly male over 65, 28 per cent; the elderly female over 65, 35 per cent of those people living below the poverty line. So some things have improved. The female, lone parent is 36 per cent in Nova Scotia, those folks that are living below the poverty line. So it takes time and vision to do something about how and why all these people are falling into poverty and that depth of poverty is going on for a longer time.

Can it be done? Yes. Just an interesting sidebar here, back in the 60s, when we came in with a lot of the programs for elderly people and so on, the seniors' poverty rate was horrendous back then, but we did something about it. We still have some elderly people in categories who are living in poverty, but overall it has been a real system, it has been looked at.

There was a Senator Crowell, who wrote a book - no, he didn't write the book, somebody wrote the book about him - but I just happened to have a copy of it because when I was a Member of Parliament, somebody gave me that book and I opened it up and on his chapter on poverty he talked about all the stuff we're talking about now. Back in the 60's, the average wage, the annual income, the guaranteed annual income, U.I.C., the supplement to the O.A.C. - all of it, he wrote all about that and he worked for years and he tracked it. He tracked all of those things that we track today. For some reason, he was able to track that back then.

Now the Senate has set up another committee, as maybe most of you are aware, about a rural and an urban poverty and it is the first time in 35 years, or whatever it is, that this has happened. I think Art Eggleton is doing it, heading it up, a lot of senators on it. This is the first time that it has been looked at as a whole.

Now lots of people say, why the hell do we do that? Why waste the money? We know what's going on. Well, there may be some truth to that, but what is that whole, integrated system? We understand clearly what some of the four corners are of all of this, but all the intricacies that you just mentioned in your remarks need to be looked at.

How is this going to turn out? I don't know, but at least - and this happened about two weeks after we did our presentation. I'm not suggesting that we drove them to it or they did it on our account, but somebody was thinking about it and was thinking along the same lines as we were. So anyway, that's happening.

I believe now, with regard to poverty, the worst thing we can do is look and blame people. We can't do that any more, we just have to say hey, we're in a mess here, we need to do something and we need structural change, of course, in what that system is all about,

but we need to work together, as provinces, territories and federal government, to bring this about.

MR. GLAVINE: If I could jump back in there, in taking a look, we realize that two provinces only have now legislated or documented a plan that they're going to move forward with. We also realize that it does need to dovetail with some national pieces as well, the provinces, I think, can best accommodate the unique circumstances and have the statistical data to work through.

With the Canadian economy roaring along at \$10 billion to \$15 billion a year over operating expenditures, that we're able to now put into programs - paying down the debt I know is a priority - what would you see as one initiative or building on something that's already there, that would have a trickle-down effect that, again, would do some lifting of those that make up that 15 per cent who have poverty elements in their life?

MS. MACDOUGALL: It's a huge issue. You say it so simply, but it is so complex. I think the position of the council is that there has to be a national vision, there has to be direction and that's the advice our reports give to the federal government.

Somewhere, we have to turn the ship and unless there's direction - now I think the federal government has areas for which they are responsible and, of course, provincial governments have their own areas, but someone has to take the first step. Now it's interesting that two provinces have done it. In Ontario, Premier McGuinty is looking at this anti-poverty strategy. I'm sensing that there is an increasing interest and dialogue around this. It strikes me that everyone has their toe in the water and no one is going to jump in. I mean two have.

At the national level, I think the challenge for the federal government is to look at the data, to listen to what citizens are saying. There is room for leadership here on this issue. It doesn't mean that in Nova Scotia we can't do our own thing, but we do need to build it on - it has to be knowledge-based and we have to show leadership, but we can't do it alone, there are so many things that are integrated.

Clearly the council's message to government is that it needs a cohesive strategy and political will to make it a non-partisan issue and to move poverty issues ahead. I mean they are inter-linked. I wish I had a simple answer but I'm going to stay by - I think so - your initial comment about how employment has changed and now the nature of work has changed. Well that then changes all kinds of things. I mean that's an economic change, people are working many jobs, no benefits or limited benefits, et cetera. The old ways are changing in terms of employment. That triggers all kinds of things in terms of what individuals need to function and live and provide for their families and society. You raised that and it is one really good example.

[10:15 a.m.]

The old programs may not fit, but yet at the last council meeting someone was at a conference and they said that one of the keynote speakers was saying that the two income family is now Canada's Social Security safety network, because most families rely on two parents and the reason why lone parent families are often in poverty is that they are alone and that the double income family has become the de facto social security network, and that stuck with me. I thought, what is this about? What does it say about the changes that are often triggered by changes in employment and the economy?

I also think that the timing of the discussion nationally and provincially is that there is some money. When we have a bit of money, we can feel as individuals a little more generous, I can give some money when I have some money and I wondered myself if - personal comment - the fact that the economy is in a better position that we're now saying, okay, maybe we can begin to look at this stuff rather than putting barriers to participation in programs up.

MR. MURPHY: You talked about a trickle down thing, we did that study, that questionnaire we talked about with 5,000 people and those 400-some organizations. One issue that they brought forward, which was the highest issue, was housing. I was there when the social housing thing was cancelled all because of the deficit, et cetera. Regardless of that, housing may be one of those things that Canadians themselves have identified in those 5,000 or whatever it was people who answered that questionnaire, as an active thing that the federal government could work on, social housing. That is one of the major things that happens out there - people who are living in poverty are often gouged as a result of their housing abilities. Landlords take advantage, so they are paying much higher rates than you and I. We would pay something in the vicinity of 30 per cent of our wages for our accommodations. People who are living in poverty are often up there at 50 per cent or 60 per cent. You can imagine what is left over for nutrition and food and all of those sorts of things.

If housing were part and parcel - I never understood clearly what happened to the Shannon Park thing that was sought about as a housing set-up and then it went for the Commonwealth Games and now I don't know what's going to happen. Housing is a real issue and people living in poverty use the health care system and what they use are the emergency rooms, as all of you know. They go there and get fixed up for a little while, but they go back home and are in the same environment, the same nutrition, their health disintegrates, et cetera and they're back and we wonder why the health care system keeps going up in terms of the percentage that we have to spend on it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Karen.

HON. KAREN CASEY: Madam Chair, I have a comment and then a question, if I could, please. First of all, thank you very much for the information you have shared, I

appreciate it, it's certainly a topic that I think everyone in this room recognizes is a concern and as members of the Legislature, we believe we have an important role to play here.

I think one of the things that we have learned as a result of the Nunn Commission in particular, is that there are many good things happening in the province but they are not well coordinated, or not as well coordinated as they could be and so one of the recommendations, of course, that came out of that is that there be coordination through the five main departments that provide services. That is to all Nova Scotians, but by saying all Nova Scotians, it also certainly includes those in poverty. I think it is a lesson we have learned and it is a model that we can use to address some of the other concerns and poverty may well be one of those.

I do have a question with respect to your statistics. There has been a reference and a link made between minimum wage and poverty. I'm wondering where the working students in the summer, whose income would be less than the poverty line, where those statistics are in those numbers? Are they excluded, are they included, is there some way that they are accounted for? Many of those people are not living in poverty, they are working for 12 months of the year so they obviously have a lower income, so where is the connection there? How does your statistics accommodate that?

MR. MURPHY: I'm not sure of the answer to that. Your question is, how does that student body, that group of people . . .

MS. CASEY: Does that skew your statistics?

MR. MURPHY: Are they in those statistics at all?

MS. CASEY: That is right.

MR. MURPHY: I'm not sure about that. The statistic that I pointed out for 2004-05, for youth, was somewhere in the vicinity of 18 per cent living below the poverty line. So that figure, I'm not sure where they get that from, 15 to 24 was somewhere in the vicinity of 20 per cent. That we know. How does that fold into the overall statistic, I'm sorry . . .

MS. CASEY: I guess the clarification I'm seeking is are those university students, as an example, who would be in that age, earning less than \$12,000, are they in those numbers or not is the question for clarification. If you can't give that answer now, perhaps that could get back to the committee.

MR. MURPHY: Yes. One of the ways that we used to try to understand it was through the EI program, that you needed so many hours as a student to qualify over the year, you know, if you were going to school but working as well. Students generally never reached that criteria of whatever it is, so many hundred hours - 900 and some-odd hours. Otherwise, I just don't know how that fits in, but they are such a vulnerable group.

We know about youth and some of the vulnerabilities that exists for them, because today life is very different for them. They can't be assured of a job for a long time. It is a continual learning curve that they're always on, so it's a population that we don't have a strategy for to deal with the difficulties that arise before them as they move ahead. We're going to lost a lot of young people in the system if something doesn't change.

MS. MACDOUGALL: I took note of your question and we have a report on youth coming, don't we?

MR. MURPHY: Yes, we do.

MS. MACDOUGALL: There is a council report being prepared on youth and when I see staff in a couple of weeks, I will raised this with them. Thank for raising it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: If you could share the explanation with the committee clerk, she will make sure that all of us get the information.

I'm going to jump in here with a question. You mentioned earlier that you had met with the coordinator and deputy minister taking the lead in Newfoundland and Labrador. I'm just wondering if you learned anything from those discussion that could help sort of kick start the effort here in Nova Scotia?

MR. MURPHY: I'll just start with that because I made a note to say to you - the coordinator came to us in Ottawa and spent a day with us talking about the program in Newfoundland and Labrador. I have her name - I believe she's on maternity leave at the moment, I'm not sure when that is finished - but I was going to say to you, that might be an ideal thing to bring her here for her to share her experiences. She will tell you, without having to reinvent the wheel, some of the things they have done in Newfoundland and I thought they were - I bet all of you haven't thought about this co-ordination that we just talked about, because certainly that's where the answer is, that we need to co-ordinate all of these efforts. One of the reasons I got into politics was I saw so many people living in poverty who were coming through our doors and you could do anything you wanted but you weren't going to necessarily change the situation, because it always dropped back to the root cause of poverty and what that does to people.

We used to run inter-agency groups in the Valley where I am from and we did that on a regular basis- education, social services, housing, et cetera. We had a mini, what they used to call that, you had a committee here that there were deputy ministers on it [Interruption] What is it?

MADAM CHAIR: The Hess Committee.

MR. MURPHY: Thank you. We had a mini-Hess committee going and it was kind of modeled after what was taking place. This is not a brag session, this is just to say that

we talk about this and we've done it before and we're back at it again, because it doesn't last. It is so important what this lady was saying, that this co-ordination needs to take place.

Some of the things that I thought we learned was just that, the co-ordination of these departments coming together, all with the same mandate. I remember asking this young lady, I said what happens when one of the minister's departments decides to go silo, as opposed to horizontal? I shouldn't ever have used the word, I said who has the stick to make sure that this gets back on? She said, we never have to use a stick, we haven't had to use a stick at all. It's discussion, talk about how do we put this thing back on the rails. Obviously that's the best answer rather than somebody pushing something that people aren't wanting, but that's what the horizontal thing is, what is required. It is all built around poverty and the co-ordination of all of those departments that reflect that poverty.

MADAM CHAIR: So was that just an internal government initiative or did they have non-profit and churches and other groups involved in driving the process?

MS. MACDOUGALL: They had consultation. What I took from what I heard, which is like second-hand, second-hand, but my impression was that it came from, it arose in Premier Williams' election platform, that there would be anti-poverty reduction. He then requested that it be acted on when he was elected. So what we heard from the political side was that there was political will to do it and that direction then given to civil servants to move it, in conjunction with community groups.

There is a little mini-doc - I have only one copy that I'll leave with you - that the groups had a lot of consultation like you have had here and the group strongly urged provincial and federal governments to increase affordable housing, to make child care and early learning available to everyone, to raise the minimum wage and increase the child tax benefit. Those were the kinds of messages that the groups in Newfoundland were giving the government.

I'm sure you've heard some more things here. I mean you hear the individual thing, but you hear the collective things. Like John, I would encourage you to invite perhaps, or have a discussion with, a political person in Newfoundland who is involved in this and also staff people. They have some very capable staff people who - and they've done work. There's a whole document on their website you can get but I think when you talk about, how do we get this going, how do we jump start it, then I don't know. How do you light the flame if it has to come from a passion for social justice and equity and how did they turn the burner on? Someone cared, I guess.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well I'm just a little concerned because the committee, including myself, have just received letters from the Premier and the Minister of Community Services today, in response to earlier correspondence to them about setting up an anti-poverty committee or poverty reduction strategy. It seems to be a very narrow interpretation of what we were asking for. I think we wanted it more comprehensive, including all the stakeholders in the process driving the development of the strategy. We're

being told that yes, the government is committed to developing a poverty strategy for Nova Scotia and one of the first steps is putting together an inter-departmental working committee tasked with the responsibility of moving the initiative forward.

[10:30 a.m.]

I think, as a committee, certainly what we heard in our forums on poverty was strong desire of all the groups involved in this issue of wanting to be part of the process, not just wanting to be part of the consultation. We have representatives here today from many of those coalitions, so I'm just worried that if we don't have that broader involvement from the beginning, that we're going to get back into this turf war again and that all parties and all stakeholders are not going to be as committed and keep pushing it in the right direction, no matter what change in individuals or leadership.

MS. MACDOUGALL: That's been a history of things over the years. I know that because I have been involved with government committees on the community side and on the government side. Okay, my quick response is you need a structure. It may not be the nuts and bolts, but I mean I'm looking at - as soon as you started to talk, I went back to the four cornerstones. What have we learned about effective anti-poverty strategies? We've learned that you need a strategy with a long-term vision, measurable targets and time lines. There may be room for consultation on that.

We need a plan of action and a budget that co-ordinates initiatives within and across government and other partners, so there's work to be done there. A government accountability structure for ensuring results and for consulting Canadians while this was the - translate this into Nova Scotia - consulting citizens in the design, implementation and evaluation of the actions that will affect them; a set of agreed poverty indicators that will be used to plan, monitor, change and assess progress. You can get caught up in that.

People say, well, you should just be the market basket measure or the low income. What the experience of others says is, you need a variety of measures. I was reading about Ireland last night - if you didn't have two pairs of sturdy shoes, it is one of the indicators of persistent, chronic poverty.

There is stuff out there. You know my experience is that we get lost at a certain point and that if you have a framework, if there are things that we know need to go into a strategy, then how best can we get that and what's the role of government? What's the role of civil servants? What's the role end of consultation?

In Quebec, they have an ongoing committee that monitors the progress in enacting the anti-poverty law, poverty elimination law, and in Newfoundland, I think they have a committee now - we're going there next week, I'm going to meet with some people, I'll be more updated then; but I think that the ongoing accountability, you have to build that in. What are the timelines? What do we hope to achieve?

We've been very good in this document and in one of the handouts I'll leave, you'll see we've signed on to all kinds of agreements, the federal government has internationally, but we haven't done well in terms of being able to co-ordinate within our own country, to implement our good intentions. So I think there are lessons learned from other sectors. From our perspective, there are four pieces that are part of an effective anti-poverty strategy and that may - I'm not saying that you have to do them, I'm just saying if you look at them, it may help you structure how you want to proceed with this.

MADAM CHAIR: I guess my specific question, and then I'll let someone else ask a question, is that much of our social safety net in Nova Scotia is delivered by community-based organizations, non-government organizations. So do you have any advice on when they need to be brought into the development of the strategy which is going to impact on their everyday operation?

MR. MURPHY: No question about it, I mean you want the broader picture first, before the government builds a strategy, you want to know what all these groups are so they become partners in your endeavour. I believe that in Quebec they have a mixture - in terms of looking at accountability - of NGOs, et cetera, and people in government.

You would want, and I would suggest to you that they have a questionnaire that they had in Newfoundland and Labrador - I'm not saying you follow what they have done because you want this made in Nova Scotia, but it will give you some ideas. The group from the national council is going to Newfoundland and Labrador, we asked Danny Williams to meet with us, and he is out of the province but he is sending one of his ministers. We will be able to come back to you with the name of that individual - I can't think of the young woman's name . . .

MS. MACDOUGALL: The senior staff person who has been responsible for coordinating the interdepartmental committee.

MR. MURPHY: But I agree with you, it is difficult to know just where to start, because when we talked a few years ago about poverty and so on, peoples' eyes glazed over. I know when it got to the Cabinet level, people were interested, but when you say we have to do something about poverty, eyes glazed over because where do we go? Where do we start, where do we take the first shovelful to start this process working? That is what I think you are struggling with.

Yes, I don't think there is any question that the groups, as you say, who are delivering a lot of the services, they can help build the strategy, they can help put together the things that we need to do to draw all of these departments together and deliver within the budget - things that can actually be counted. Then you have to go back to those people, along with government, and see how you have done, be accountable to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador or the people of Nova Scotia.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Pat.

MR. PATRICK DUNN: Just a couple of questions. You mentioned earlier in your initial statement that you were chairman for approximately nine years. During that particular time when the Premiers and leaders of the country were getting together, even the Atlantic Premiers in a symposium or whatever, was this ever a topic, to your knowledge, on the agenda anytime they may have met?

MR. MURPHY: Well, I would say yes - how serious that was, I'm not sure. Meet for a couple of days and there are always such agenda items, you know what it is like. Certainly I know when I worked with Jane Stewart, in particular, when she was minister and went to meetings she raised these issues. Was there any consensus that we needed to do something as provinces, territories and federal government? I don't know the answer to that, of course, but I think that is what we need to go after, and I think it needs to come both ways. I think the provinces need to encourage the federal government and vice versa. The more provinces that take on a strategy, it is going to move the federal government into its role, and the rightful role, to be doing some of these things.

We used to have the CAP program and 50-cent dollars and we lost all of that, but that kept the federal government very much involved in programming and so on. That got lost as a result of the deficit, et cetera. I thought that was a mistake, but that is history. We have to move forward to find out how we can better work together, and I think that we are at a fresh start almost.

I'm sure some of this has been discussed, but when somebody comes to the table like the Province of Nova Scotia and says we're really interested in doing something about poverty, the tone then changes - as opposed to something less than that, yes, we are interested - but we're now serious, we're going to do something.

MR. DUNN: I really appreciate your presentation this morning and the comments and information that you have. It is certainly a very disturbing picture, not only for the province but across the country, and as members we certainly have a responsibility to do something about it.

I would like to make a comment with regard to - I also have a letter, Madam Chairman. I referred to a few minutes ago, and we interpret letters differently and my interpretation is a little different from the Chair in this particular matter. We talk about consistency, we talk about the cohesiveness of programs and so on and avoiding these isolated attempts to carry the flag which don't seem to work. As I slide over this letter, I'm encouraged by it because the first thing I see is interdepartmental working committee. To me, that is very positive, you don't have one committee carrying a flag, you are going to have several.

Another comment that is made in the letter is that this interdepartmental committee is going to obtain information from the key stakeholder groups so they're not going to be running isolated - they are going to be going to all the key stakeholders. I am encouraged by seeing that - that perhaps finally something positive is in the works and is going to

happen. Once again, those were just comments I wanted to make in reference to that letter. Thank you.

MS. MACDOUGALL: May I respond a little bit? I don't know the letter, but I think that from the community perspective, where I spent a lot of my practice, it is important to see timelines and outcomes, and I know government is interested in outcomes because it gives a sense that it is going to move forward. We talk about accountability and demonstrated outcomes and I think the feeling is it is not just another interdepartmental committee, but that there is a definite mission, there's a definite request, and that there is a process where you are moving forward with a purpose and what those purposes are. That is where part of developing your strategy is that accountability and movement piece, so that it doesn't get stopped in committee, that it keeps moving. I think that is the piece in our cornerstone that is important, that there's accountability, there is movement, there is transparency and those things, in addition to the things you mentioned, or as part of them they are highlighted.

Communities like to be involved but they also want to know that the investment and time that they make in these processes are going to lead somewhere - their time is precious too. I think that is an important message, it has to go to the community and to those affected by issues of poverty. It goes back to the political will thing that came through so strongly to me in the consultations we had with others who have gone a little further down the road.

MR. DUNN: I guess my last comment would be that my only wish would be the investment in time by this particular committee - that they take advantage of the data that is already available so they don't waste time as far as the duplication of it. That they take advantage of what already has been done and what we already know, to move along a little quicker.

MR. MURPHY: Yes, you don't have to go back and start over again.

MS. MACDOUGALL: You have the benefit of your two forums on poverty . . .

MR. DUNN: Right.

MR. MURPHY: One of the pitfalls sometimes with all of this is that somebody will raise the idea, what about measurement of poverty? We presently use LICO, or Low-Income Cut-Offs, and that is what most anti-poverty groups use around the country as a measurement. The federal government doesn't call it a poverty cut-off, but it is the one we have. We do have the market-basket one, but that has only been updated to 2002, but some people want to get into that while people still suffer in poverty.

[10:45 a.m.]

What I'm getting at is, that will come but we don't need to put that at the head of the cart because if we put that at the head of the cart, we'll be arguing now until the cows come home. The measurement and the definition of poverty is another one. We have an Ireland thing - do we have the Ireland thing?

MS. MACDOUGALL: Yes, we've got tons of paper for you.

MR. MURPHY: They have a very simplistic definition of poverty and you'll see it there. I can't give it off the top, I can't remember it totally, but you always - you know how people, academics and so on, want to get into how do we do all this? How do we measure it? How do we know these people are living in poverty? Who said that? I don't know, and that argument starts.

When the market-basket measurement came out - it was back in 2004, but it was 2001. The provinces at that time thought that the market basket would reflect better on the poverty rates in each of their provinces and territories. What we found out at the time, because we did a press conference, I happened to be in Vancouver at the time, or Victoria, and found that market basket, and that is a basket of goods that people can draw from and it is territorial-built and rural versus urban and so on, we found it was pretty close to what the LICO was, so there wasn't a great difference. It looked like there was going to be a wonderful argument about all of this and our poverty rates are much lower if we use market basket but not so. I just thought I'd raise that as a flag that sometimes people want to raise to stall action.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Wayne.

MR. WAYNE GAUDET: Thank you, Madam Chair. Gail and John, thank you very much for your presentation this morning. John, in your opening comments, you indicated that poverty is difficult to understand, but Canadians do understand if our country is making progress in reducing poverty in our country. Also you indicated that there are some countries out there that are making gains, they are making progress.

This has not been a new issue in our country, so I'm just trying to understand why isn't Canada making a gain in reducing poverty? This has been ongoing - you mentioned the Senator back in 1960 - in the last 50 years. Why aren't we making any progress? I know it is a loaded question.

MR. MURPHY: No, no, that's been sort of the basis of our whole discussion here this morning. I think - well, there's a number of answers, okay. I think the major answer is that we need that political will, we need that vision, we need that leadership to put this on the front burner. I think that poor people aren't very important in this country, at least we have not taken them as very important in this country. We've allowed it to slip back and

let them slip back and slip back and watch the safety net drop, drop, drop. We haven't jumped in.

Lots of people are talking about it. Your people are talking about it, lots of people are talking about it, but it has not become a priority for Canadians. Once it becomes a priority for Canadians, as health care did and has, the horse could be out of the barn. Canadians are not going to accept an unjust situation for all Canadians, that we're leaving so many Canadians behind and they're not allowed to participate in all of the things that we all around this room participate in. If we don't do something about that, it is just going to get larger.

Wayne, you know in 1989, as I mentioned, the stats were around 15 per cent. In 2005, the stats are the same and we were going to banish poverty by 2000. Now, you know we did have some troubles in there with recession, et cetera, somewhat of a recession, but look at what has gone on in the last 10 years. Canada is doing extremely well, yet we're going behind. For those who are living in poverty, that gap is wider.

I think it comes back to somebody having to take the bull by the horns and have that vision and leadership and work with the provinces and territories to make that happen, to make that national vision happen.

MR. GAUDET: Thank you. Gail, I have one question for you. You talked about Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador that have legislated strategies to reduce poverty in their provinces. My first question is, do we need to legislate a strategy for government and for governments to follow in order to abide by? At the same time I've always found, since I've been around - you can have all the legislation in place, but it seems that every year there are excuses. I think you've indicated Nova Scotia does not have deep pockets and naturally next year, if poverty reduction is not a top priority, you can have anything legislated. So I guess my question to you is, do you see any government, where we have two right now that have brought this in legislation, I'm just wondering what your take on that is.

MS. MACDOUGALL: Interesting. Just for clarification, it is the Province of Quebec that has law and the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador has got an anti-poverty reduction strategy. So we have two models here. We have the Quebec model that is based on legislation, which it is only a couple of years now so we're going to have to watch and see the effectiveness. The strategy in Newfoundland - again, we're going to have to see how that moves forward. So when you look at accountability pieces in the anti-poverty reduction strategy in Nova Scotia, we're going to have to look at what the experience is.

Does legislation hold government to a higher level of accountability than a strategy that's implemented under the leadership of a particular government, at a particular point in time? Does legislation hold the track and the vision and direct government in spending more effectively than the other approach, which is more perhaps by - they both came

because of consensus. I mean no one voted against it in Quebec - who is going to vote against poverty was what we heard, but then it is what we do with it.

Now whether, in terms of accountability pieces, one is more effective than the other, I don't know, but we're in a position where we have two provinces that have gone different routes and we can use and learn from their experience.

When I personally first heard about the legislation, I thought was pretty strong, pretty clear and might be more effective in terms of directing dollars and energies and that sort of thing, but I don't know, we have to see the outcome. Again, in tracking the effectiveness of either approach, there are bodies set up that involve government and community people in tracking and giving feedback on progress. So the main thing is, you have an effective monitoring system.

We have an interesting opportunity here to learn from the experience of two people, two different groups I should say, so I don't know the answer to that. In Nova Scotia, you might feel stronger and less subject to the winds of change if it is in legislation. These are questions for you folks to take and chew over and keep in touch with what's happening and learning from them.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Does anyone else want to speak in round one of questions? Two people have indicated they want to ask a quick question in round two. Okay, we'll have Leo and then Karen, very quickly.

MR. GLAVINE: Certainly, there is no silver bullet, there is no golden nugget - I have sought for that a little bit this morning - but having attended the two poverty forums, I absolutely believe that despite the Premier's strong and good intentions here to have an interdepartmental approach, I think we would be losing a tremendous wealth of knowledge, inspiration and action-oriented people who came to those poverty committees. If we didn't embrace them inside of that first established committee, I think we would be deficient for that.

Our Party has a bill before the Legislature, Bill No. 74, we had a resolution in the Spring that everybody agreed to. The time is for action here in this province and I want it to be an all-Party and an all-encompassing approach that we can take. To that end - preaching a little bit here - I do have a motion that I would like to put before us today and it goes like this, that we form or strike a poverty reduction strategy committee made up of government departments and non-governmental agencies in consultation with the National Council of Welfare, to start the process of developing a poverty reduction strategy for Nova Scotia.

MR. COLWELL: I second that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I just want to clarify, we have already adopted a very similar motion and that was the basis of the letter to the Premier. The only addition might

be working in consultation with the National Council on Welfare. I will accept the motion because it certainly reaffirms our earlier motion, but it is certainly not a change in direction. Okay, it has been seconded. Is there any discussion on the motion?

MR. MURPHY: I just wanted to say, the National Council of Welfare obviously will be of help in any way we can. That we would - I'm not sure if your motion indicated that but that we would - sit in on a such a committee would be beyond our realm I would think, but that maybe is not what you meant.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Just before I call for the vote, why don't I just . . .

MR. GLAVINE: I may need to read it again because I wrote a note there.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, why don't you reread it so we are clear on how we are involving the national council.

MR. GLAVINE: That we strike a poverty reduction strategy committee made up of government departments and non-governmental agencies and in consultation with the National Council of Welfare, start the process of developing a poverty reduction strategy for Nova Scotia.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The only difference between that and the earlier motion a couple of meetings ago is that we also asked for representatives from all three political Parties. So that is not in the new one, right?

MR. GLAVINE: Well, I guess government departments . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: There is a big difference between government departments and . . .

MR. GLAVINE: Yes, I guess Party representatives would need to be in as well, so we could add that in.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MS. MACDOUGALL: If I may just speak to the role of the national council. The national council is advisory to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development. At the federal level we make our materials available freely, but I would just like clarification to what you saw as consultation? We really are in a para-governmental role.

MR. GLAVINE: Just that purpose that we would be able to gather data that you use and that sort of process.

MS. MACDOUGALL: It is already freely available to you.

MR. GLAVINE: Or sit in as John indicated to give us possible direction.

MR. MURPHY: I think that goes without saying, I'm not sure that it needs to be in the motion is all I am saying, because the council will . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So you would feel more comfortable by withdrawing the direct reference?

MR. MURPHY: Given our role which is a national role, but that doesn't mean that we wouldn't - well, obviously, here we are. We are working with provinces and will continue to do that.

MR. MACDOUGALL: We're happy to be here and our information is fully available but I'm not sure that by putting us in there whether it is really our formal role.
[11:00 a.m.]

MR. GLAVINE: No, I understood the process then.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, so Leo, I'm not clear now; since it's now back to our original motion, which has already been unanimously adopted earlier, do you still want to reaffirm?

MR. GLAVINE: Well if it's an exact motion, I mean I just want to try to stir things so that we do get things moving because we've been talking for two years.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, I don't have it in front of me but my recollection is that it includes all the elements that you just mentioned.

MR. GLAVINE: If it's already there, then that's fine, we can withdraw the motion.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you. Karen, did you have a quick question?

MS. CASEY: Yes, actually a comment and thank you, Madam Chair. I know it has been said more than once that one of the reasons why we don't seem to be moving forward, provincially or nationally, is because we've lacked will and leadership.

I'm troubled a little bit by that because I think over the last 50 years, we've had strong leadership from more than one political Party, at both the national and the provincial level. So I'm a little bit troubled by those comments, if it is suggesting that that is what has stalled it because I'm not sure that that is what has stalled it. I go back to Wayne Gaudet's comment, why have we not moved forward? Because I believe there has been strong leadership, both provincially and nationally, and somehow we still have an unfortunate situation, so I just wanted to make that comment. I don't think there's any answer to that but I had to express that concern.

MS. MACDOUGALL: May I respond? The piece about political will is what we heard consistently in our consultations with Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador. That what it took to move it forward was someone or some group with the political will. That's where that came from - that it took some how to get it going, something to get it going, and the way it was expressed to us was political will.

Now one can wonder what that means. I think, though, your comments raised for me the question: We have been well-intended, we have wanted change, I think what we need to look at is, what are the barriers to change? What's been holding us back from achieving the goals of poverty reduction?

We just shared what we heard from others around that, what it took to jump-start us but if there has been political will, then I think the question we have to grapple with - and as a citizen of this province I wonder, too - what have been the barriers? It is probably a huge discussion but not to be daunted by that. The position of the National Council was that there can be forward movement, there are lessons to be learned and we do have some information to contribute to the dialogue.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We are out of time and I am going to have to bring this to a close. On behalf of the committee, I want to thank you sincerely for the information and your involvement and passion on this issue, for many, many years I realize. I think you've gained, that our message is that as a committee, we want to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. If there's any way that we can be a catalyst for proactive action and co-operation in this province, we want to be part of that.

So on behalf of all of us, thank you very, very much. I hope that we'll stay in touch. We'll certainly use your information and if you learn more about other situations that you think might be relevant in Nova Scotia, we'd appreciate your sharing that with us. Thank you again, very, very much.

MS. MACDOUGALL: We thank you for the invitation.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Just to bring to the committee's attention, our next meeting is June 21st and we'll have witnesses from Nova Scotia Leo, the Abilities Foundation and People First, talking about services for persons with disabilities in Nova Scotia.

The meeting is adjourned. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 11:04 a.m.]