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May 21, 2009

PROVINCE MARKS 10 YEARS OF FIGHTING POVERTY WITH NEW STRATEGY CALLED ALL ABOARD

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Vision Sets Goals for Affordable Housing, Training, Jobs and Healthy Families: Selinger, Mackintosh

A poverty-reduction strategy called ALL Aboard, based on an annual investment of more than \$744 million including \$212 million of new investments, will focus on long-term solutions to help low income Manitobans, Finance Minister Greg Selinger and Family Services and Housing Minister Gord Mackintosh announced today.

"Everything we do as a government, from budgeting to social policy decisions, is weighed for its ability to reduce poverty and increase the inclusion of low-income Manitobans in all aspects of community life," Selinger said. "Many groundbreaking initiatives, such as Closing the Gap, Neighbourhoods Alive!, Healthy Child Manitoba, Family Choices, the Manitoba Hydro Northern Training and Employment Initiative, and Rewarding Work, have made a real difference in the lives of Manitobans. We intend to build on this success with ALL Aboard."

"During the past 10 years, Manitoba has achieved significant success in reducing poverty," Mackintosh said. "Given the current global economic challenges, it makes sense to build on this work and strengthen the programs and initiatives currently in place."

"Manitoba's child poverty rate has decreased by 40 per cent since 2000. This is unprecedented progress. However, too many Manitobans still cannot participate in the general prosperity. With an unsettled economy, which can unexpectedly imperil any family, we must co-ordinate the way we tackle the roots of poverty for the good of all Manitobans."

The ministers said poverty is about more than a lack of money alone; it is a combination of problems that keep people from participating in the economy or in society. In recognition of this complexity, ALL Aboard has four priorities: to create more affordable housing, strengthen training and income supports, enhance child development, and ease access to co-ordinated services and programs.

Initiatives fall under four pillars:

Safe, affordable housing in supportive communities:

- an expanded HOMEWorks! program,*
- a new vision for Manitoba Housing,*
- a new homeless and mental-health housing strategy,
- Manitoba Shelter Benefit enhancements,*
- more Lighthouses,*
- a SafetyAid expansion for low income seniors,* and
- an expanded Neighbourhoods Alive! program.

Education, jobs and income support:

- a graduation rate initiative including a new northern Aboriginal Youth Internship program;*
- stronger post-secondary education access initiatives through Bright Futures;
- a new strategy for people with disabilities;*
- Rebound, Manitoba's back to work action plan;*
- new Rewarding Work Initiatives including mental-health support and recreational opportunities pilots;*
- a minimum wage increase in October 2009;
- property and personal tax credit increases and an increase in the low-income threshold;
- the Manitoba Saves! asset building program; and

Strong, healthy families:

- new family resource centres in community schools,*
- a Healthy Foods action fund,*
- a new family-enhancement stream in child welfare,* and
- more affordable, quality child care.*

Accessible, co-ordinated services:

- ServiceLink, a new navigation strategy to help Manitobans access benefits and services;*
- MYTEAM, a youth transition employment assistance program to help youth aging out of child welfare;* and
- the new Career Development Gateway, providing single-window access to help people develop their careers.

(*Full announcement pending.)

To kick-start the strategy, the province is simultaneously launching a HOMEWorks! homeless strategy with a focus on mental-health housing.

The impact of ALL Aboard will be strengthened by a growing economy and strong partnerships, the ministers said. These partnerships will include the federal and municipal governments, business and community groups, First Nations, Métis and all Manitobans.

"Poverty is everyone's responsibility," said Susan Lewis, president of the United Way of Winnipeg. "Without strong partnerships and participation from all sectors, we will never reach our shared goal of reducing poverty."

The ALL Aboard strategy will act in co-ordination with organizations such as the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council (WPRC).

"This strategy is aligned with our work and we will continue to collaborate with the provincial government on poverty-reduction initiatives," said Cindy Coker, co-chair of the WPRC.

"The province has supported the WPRC financially and otherwise since its inception and I know that this strong working relationship will continue with this new strategy," said Jim Carr, co-chair of the WPRC.

The strength of the strategy is in its goal of demonstrating a measurable trend of overall progress on poverty reduction and social inclusion, said the ministers.

To measure progress on poverty reduction, a set of key indicators from the four pillars of the strategy will be tracked and annually reported. These indicators could include the market-basket measure of income (which considers the cost of living), graduation rates, early development instrument scores, percentage of children 12 and under for whom there is a licensed child-care space available, and take up of pre-natal, shelter and child benefits. When taken together, these indicators will provide a true picture of Manitoba's progress, they added.

Implementation, progress and annual public reporting will be overseen by a new interdepartmental working group co-chaired by Manitoba Finance and Manitoba Family Services and Housing, reporting to a Ministers' Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Committee.

The province will consult on the proposed strategy with a view to concluding a series of measures that are expected to be reported in 2010-11.