

Tuesday, December 5, 2000



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS No. 1

SECOND SESSION, THIRTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE

1:30 O'CLOCK P.M.

This being the first day of the meeting of the Second Session of the Thirty-Seventh Legislature of the Province of Manitoba convoked by Proclamation of His Honour Peter LIBA, Lieutenant Governor for the dispatch of business, and the Members of the House being assembled,

His Honour Peter LIBA, was pleased to open the session with the following gracious speech:

Mister Speaker and Members of the Manitoba Legislature:

Welcome to the second session of the thirty-seventh Legislative Assembly of the Province of Manitoba.

Since the election of a year ago my Ministers have been working in partnership with Manitoba citizens to keep the commitments which form the government's mandate:

- To restore public health care in all regions of our province;
- To provide new hope for young people through opportunities in education;
- To make our communities safer;
- To reduce property taxes through increased tax credits; and
- To maintain and improve the balanced budget law.

My Ministers have made solid progress on these commitments and believe they will make a great deal more in the coming year.

Your government recognizes that it must continue to concentrate on Manitoba's immediate priorities and must do so within limited budgetary resources.

Our province, like most of the others across Canada, faces cost pressures in health, education and other priority services delivered by government. That is why the new health financing agreement which was worked out by First Ministers in September, following a very successful Premiers' Conference here in Winnipeg in August, was important. This was a first step in restoring fairness and balance to the federal-provincial health partnership.

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The federal government must continue to strengthen its partnership with the provinces, both through the Canada Health and Social Transfer, and through the national equalization program.

My Ministers are aware that the decisions they make now will shape the future of Manitoba. In making those decisions they will be guided by a long-term vision for Manitoba.

Their vision is a broad one. It encompasses the generations, from the elders of our province, who have met and addressed great changes in their lives, to the child born today, who will face all the changes the future brings.

As members of the Assembly, you well understand that it is not only for the citizens of today that you govern, but for the future citizens of Manitoba, whose lives will be influenced by the decisions you make today.

Let us think ahead to the year 2020, which is the 150th anniversary of Manitoba's birth as a province. In 2020 the Manitoba child born today will be preparing to enter the workforce and to assume the full duties of citizenship.

What are the legacies we wish to establish for the children who will come of age in 2020?

First, a society that supports their development, *as learners*, from their earliest years through their working careers.

Second, a society that is committed to the practice of *sustainable growth* – growth that is compatible with responsible stewardship of our financial, human and natural resources.

Third, an *inclusive society*, in which citizens from all backgrounds and regions are treated fairly and have equal opportunities to pursue their goals.

This legacy will become a reality if we build on our *Manitoba advantage*: the creativity of our people, the diversity of our economy and the richness of our natural resources.

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A society committed to lifelong learning is one of the most important legacies we can create for our children.

Success at learning is the indispensable ingredient for success in the new economy. This is a simple formula, but achieving it will require foresight and cooperation.

This year a crucial first step was taken, with new investments designed to improve and expand our learning institutions.

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When your government came into office, it faced a massive infrastructure deficit at our colleges and universities. They are acting now to rebuild our campuses. This year they announced a \$50 million infrastructure renewal program for the University of Manitoba – to be matched by at least \$50 million in private sector donations for a total investment of \$100 million. Your government is also investing \$31 million in an expanded downtown campus for Red River College. More investments in education infrastructure will be announced this session, ensuring that we build for the future and that our Manitoba institutions are a first choice for our youth.

As promised in the election, school and university funding increases this year reflected the growth in our economy.

As promised, a new college expansion fund increased post-secondary options throughout the province.

And, as promised, students at Manitoba colleges and universities saw their tuition costs reduced by 10%. In addition, over 5,700 Manitoba students received financial support through new federal and provincial bursary programs.

The impact of making tuition more affordable and of investing in education was immediate. This fall, the increases in enrollment in Manitoba colleges and universities were the highest in over a decade.

The most dramatic increases were in areas critical to our future. There are 446 more nursing students enrolled in Manitoba this year, in Bachelor of Nursing programs and in the re-established Nursing Diploma program. Computer science programs at the University of Manitoba are projected to graduate 35% more students, following a special investment in program expansion.

Support for our students will remain a priority. But to create a learning society your government knows it must broaden its efforts. It needs to forge the partnerships that foster learning success, starting in early childhood and continuing through our citizens' working lives.

The conditions for successful learning are in place long before a child enters kindergarten. The investment we make in early childhood development is repaid over an entire lifetime.

In our rapidly changing workplaces, education is an ongoing requirement. Along with particular skills working Manitobans need the ability to adapt to new knowledge and new techniques.

Your government believes that the most effective way to assist in early childhood development is to support the nurturing role of parents. The budget presented this past spring will deliver \$100 million in tax credits and tax reductions to Manitoba families.

In line with changes in federal legislation, provincial legislation will be introduced to increase unpaid parental leave in Manitoba from 17 to 37 weeks.

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The new Healthy Child initiative will support parents and those working with children in our communities. Your government is proposing a Canadian first: a targeted pre-natal benefit for pregnant mothers.

Healthy Child initiatives already underway include an expansion of Fetal Alcohol prevention programs and the establishment of a network of Parent Child Centres across Manitoba. In addition, your government has increased investment in child care.

Public schools are increasingly becoming *community* schools – centres of activity for seniors, parents, adult learners and community sports.

My Ministers will continue to extend the benefits and hours of operation of local schools – keeping more gyms and computer rooms open at night and making schools a resource base for the parents of preschool children.

At the same time, they will work with schools to improve parent and community participation, supported by clear reporting of school mission statements.

Classroom learning will be linked with education experiences available outside the school. High school students should have the option of taking university or college courses for credit. Students should get credit on their transcripts for their community volunteer work. Every graduating student should assemble a portfolio that reflects the breadth of their learning experiences.

These are the best practices for education. Students in a number of Manitoba schools are already benefiting from them. With the assistance of educators and parent councils your government will develop an expanded set of learning options that can be made available to students across Manitoba.

At the post-secondary level, our main challenge is to increase our skilled workforce. The importance of this challenge cannot be overestimated. Over the past decade the percentage of Manitoba young people enrolled in post-secondary courses fell to the lowest level in the country.

With the input of workers and employers your government will develop a new Manitoba training strategy this year. The strategy will include: continued expansion of our college system; expansion of apprenticeship spaces; and new forms of on-the-job training. Your government is also committed to providing realistic "back to school" options for adults who lack formal credentials.

Special consideration must be given to the training needs of Aboriginal youth. Consultations are underway to improve and expand post-secondary education in the North. New training programs, such as the Nursing Diploma program, put a priority on Aboriginal students. My Ministers are pleased to acknowledge that the Manitoba business community has launched its own initiative to expand and promote Aboriginal training.

Increased immigration is another way to address skills shortages. Building on the existing Provincial Nominee Program, and working in cooperation with business and community partners, the province will seek a new agreement with the federal government to increase Manitoba's share of skilled immigrants. Your government also supports the efforts of our local communities to mount a "Welcome Home" campaign. This campaign will take advantage of our strong job market to attract citizens with previous ties to Manitoba.

One of the most critical new elements in Manitoba's education and development strategy is a set of initiatives linking research activities to emerging knowledge-based industries. Areas targeted for development include health research, food and crop development, alternative energy sources and information technology. In each case, the intention is to build on Manitoba's existing strengths.

Health research in Manitoba has been enhanced by the expansion of the cardiac surgical and diagnostic program at St. Boniface hospital. Resulting synergies have led to a proposal to expand the hospital's Research Centre and establish a new clinical research institute.

Manitoba Universities are developing leading edge programs in crop development, biotechnology and transportation research.

With very little fanfare, Winnipeg has emerged as a centre for the development of alternative fuel vehicles. The Kraus Group is researching applications for hydrogen fuel cell technology. Alternative fuel buses are being developed by Motor Coach Industries and New Flyer Industries.

Outside of Winnipeg, there are bright prospects for our ethanol industries. Your government is committing to a 10 year tax advantage to promote the production and use of ethanol additives in Manitoba. Ethanol use is better for our environment and a promising economic opportunity for Manitoba farmers and producers.

Along with a commitment to learning and innovation, knowledge-based industries require access to investment capital, advanced infrastructure, and a legislative framework that accommodates new business practices.

Your government has supported creation of the Keystone Technologies Fund. This fund is dedicated to providing start-up capital for companies in health-related industries.

My Ministers are committed to improving infrastructure throughout Manitoba. Initiatives include the Community Connections program, which will provide 440 new public internet access sites across Manitoba; and a Broadband Initiative that will improve high speed internet access to individuals and businesses.

Your government has also acted quickly to provide a legal framework that will promote the growth of e-commerce in Manitoba. Legislation passed this year provides greater security for Manitoba companies conducting business over the internet. New protections for consumer purchases will be proclaimed this month, putting Manitoba at the forefront of Canadian jurisdictions.

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Taken together these initiatives provide Manitobans with access to the skills they need and opportunities to pursue their goals right here in Manitoba.

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Another legacy we must leave for the child born today is a healthy and sustainable environment. Over the past year your government has worked with citizens to move from the development of sustainability policies to action.

My Ministers are now implementing the key recommendations of the *Consultation on Sustainable Development Implementation Report*, which include eco-system based planning, a more participatory process for environmental licensing, and involvement of Aboriginal people in resource development.

Safeguarding Manitoba's water resources is an essential priority. Last year your government banned the export of bulk water. This fall they began a comprehensive environmental review of the Assiniboine River Basin.

Alongside Lake Winnipeg Fishermen and their federal counterparts, my Ministers opposed North Dakota water projects that would damage the Manitoba environment. Because these projects are still being pursued by their proponents, your government will continue to vigilantly defend Manitoba's and Canada's interests.

In the coming year, new strategies will be introduced to increase protection of our drinking water and our lakes and rivers. Developed in a series of consultations held across Manitoba, these strategies will support a greater role for local citizens in monitoring and managing water quality. As a first step, your government is restoring public support for citizens to test their well water.

A second priority is the health of our boreal forests. The first eco-system based planning process has already been initiated for the spectacular Canadian Shield forest area that lies to the east of Lake Winnipeg. This process will bring together First Nations communities and other local stakeholders. The plan that is developed for the East Side will serve as a model for Manitoba's extensive forest region.

Citizen involvement in environmental planning and licensing increases environmental awareness. Part of a growing awareness is the recognition that strong environmental protections are not a barrier to economic growth. Environmental protection measures can in fact lead to added economic opportunities for Manitoba.

Healthy lakes and forests are an important element of the quality of life we enjoy, and a key attraction for visitors to our province. Within the coming year your government will introduce a new strategy for promoting Manitoba as an eco-tourism destination.

Manitoba's fresh water is also the source of one of our most important economic advantages: our ability to generate renewable hydro-electric power.

Your government sees Manitoba Hydro as a major advantage for our future growth. Hydro represents jobs in Manitoba – quality, long-term jobs in communities throughout our province.

Hydro also represents a reliably-priced, clean energy option, which attracts energy intensive industries to our province. Stable electricity prices were a decisive factor in developments announced in the past month: the Albchem plant near Virden and the Nexen expansion in Brandon. Together, these plants represent an investment of over \$90 million in Manitoba and a major boost to the province's economic diversification strategy.

Hydro is set to play a key role in promoting energy efficiency in Manitoba. This program – the most aggressive conservation program in our history – will have two components:

- A PowerSmart homes initiative will give Manitobans access to home audits and retrofit loans to help keep their energy bills down;
- A five year Public Building Initiative will ensure that all Manitoba arenas, curling rinks, schools, hospitals and personal care homes have a plan for achieving long term energy savings. This program was piloted at the Brandon School Division in April and will achieve \$90,000 in energy savings for that school division alone.

Evidence of global warming is spurring rapid development of alternative 'green' energy sources. With our abundance of fresh water and our access to reliable, low-cost energy, Manitoba has the opportunity to become a leader in the production of hydrogen fuel.

Your government supports Hydro's increased investment in alternative energy research, including research into the feasibility of micro-hydro projects in Manitoba, wind, solar, and geothermal power generation, and the application of micro-turbine waste management in the hog industry.

My Ministers' long-term commitment is to ensure that Manitoba is a leader in energy production and energy conservation.

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A third legacy we can leave to the child born today is an *inclusive society*, in which each citizen and each community has real opportunities for growth.

Your government is committed to fair treatment for the regions of our province. This year they eliminated discriminatory health fees charged to northern residents. They recognized northern infrastructure needs in their budget and worked with the federal government and Omnitrax to promote the Port of Churchill.

My Ministers have brought First Nations to the table, as full partners, through new protocols in justice, family services and resource development.

More will be done. This session the Province will move to one Manitoba rate for residential hydro users. A household in The Pas or in Lac du Bonnet will pay the same basic rate for hydro service as a household in Winnipeg. This move reflects your government's commitment to ensuring that citizens in all regions of the province share equally in our Manitoba advantages.

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This session, your government will announce a new Physician Recruitment and Retention Plan. The Plan builds on initiatives already taken to address the shortage of physicians in rural and northern Manitoba, and on the \$3 million investment in nurse training. One element will be an increase in admissions to the Faculty of Medicine.

Substantial investments were made this year in health capital and health service improvements throughout Manitoba. Measures were also put in place to ensure that our health resources are directed to front line care. This session, new measures will be introduced to improve transparency and accountability for our health investments.

Your government has worked hard to secure income loss compensation for Manitoba farmers and to promote rural economic diversification. They negotiated a compensation package with the federal government last February, followed by a three year farm safety net program this fall.

My Ministers will continue to work hard to support the farm economy and the family farm. They will seek to do so in partnership with the federal government. Dealing with the subsidy policies of our major competitors must also continue to be a high priority for Canada.

Our provincial crop insurance program was expanded to cover acres that were unseeded due to high moisture levels. This session, to assist farmers who are facing continued low prices for grain and oilseeds, crop insurance premiums will be reduced.

This session your government will also announce the first elements of Project 2000, which is a program to assist younger producers to begin managing farm operations, while addressing the needs of retiring producers. One element already underway is a mentoring program designed to increase the management skills of young or beginning farmers.

New markets, new products and new technology will be the building blocks of a more resilient rural economy. Your government is working with farmers to foster new sectors, including alternative crops, organic production, and premium livestock options. Rural stewardship measures include the formation of an independent Livestock Stewardship Panel and new supports for watershed management plans that will address water storage and drainage problems throughout Manitoba.

The International Joint Commission has recently identified significant new investments needed to improve flood protection in the Red River Valley. Your government believes this advice must be heeded. They will seek the support of the federal government to partner with the province, as was done almost half a century ago, to strengthen the legacy of the Floodway for future generations.

As well, an historic understanding signed recently by the Premier of Manitoba and the Governors of North Dakota and Minnesota will improve cross-border cooperation and information-sharing on flooding and flood mitigation, both now and in the years to come.

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Your government is continuing its commitment to the revitalization of our urban neighbourhoods. They will soon be announcing the details of a program to provide stable funding for community-based organizations. This is an extension of the partnership model developed through Neighbourhoods Alive! initiatives in Thompson, Brandon and Winnipeg, and the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative. More announcements of community-based projects will be made shortly.

My Ministers are working to address the unique challenges faced by our two largest centres, Winnipeg and Brandon, in promoting economic and downtown development. Their partnership priorities include the re-establishment of Brandon's role as a regional health centre, through new capital investments, and the establishment of a province-wide emergency response centre. In Winnipeg, downtown development efforts will receive a major boost with the construction of a new campus for the Red River College. The government expects to announce further projects for both cities in the coming months.

Your government's commitment to fairness means a commitment to our most vulnerable citizens. They have taken action to reinforce the protections available to seniors and persons in care, and to victims of crime. This year they will issue a White Paper outlining the government's strategy on disabilities, and a new plan for the mental health treatment and support.

In addition, they have introduced measures to make citizens safer. These include penalties to discourage car theft and drunk driving, and funding for additional policing in communities throughout the province.

This year my Ministers will add supports for citizen patrols and introduce a new Community Protection Act. They will move to a graduated drivers' license for young drivers, a policy that has reduced traffic deaths in other provinces. They will also introduce measures to improve workplace safety, appoint a new Farm Safety Coordinator and reinstate the Rural Stress Line.

Your government is committed to protecting Manitoba children. One of our most urgent responsibilities is to reduce the number of children living in poverty. In addition to Healthy Child initiatives, program changes will be announced this session to benefit children in poverty. New legislation will strengthen enforcement of family maintenance orders. As well, new measures will be introduced to protect children on the internet and a Child Victim's court in Winnipeg will help to ease the trauma of children who must give testimony in criminal trials.

In response to the Report of the Manitoba Pediatric Cardiac Surgery Inquest, your government has appointed a special committee to immediately review the recommendations and ensure prompt implementation.

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To enhance government accountability, steps will be taken to make Manitoba laws and policy initiatives more accessible to citizens over the internet. Legislation will be introduced to require that any proposal for wholesale privatization of a major crown corporation will be submitted to citizens for approval. And a new set of Manitoba Progress Indicators will be introduced to measure progress in restoring health care, protecting our environment and supporting the development of our children and youth.

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Learning, sustainability and inclusiveness: those are the watchwords of your government's vision for the future. If your policies and decisions are guided by them, the child born today will enjoy a rich legacy.

The strength of the Manitoba economy gives my Ministers confidence to fulfill their vision. We now have the lowest rate of unemployment in the country. Job creation and population growth are at their highest levels in 15 years.

Your government's strategy for future growth builds on our Manitoba Advantage. Our advantage lies in the diversity of our economy, our abundance of natural resources, the resilience and creativity of our citizens. To sustain that advantage my Ministers believe they will need to safeguard our resources and invest in our people.

A cooperative effort is required. This past spring, the Manitoba Century Summit brought together business, labour and community leaders to assess the challenges and opportunities facing Manitoba.

A Premier's Advisory Council will continue the dialogue begun at the Summit, and ensure that strategic initiatives in training, immigration and investment are coordinated between the major partners in our economy.

Ultimately, it is the choices of individual citizens and businesses that will determine our economic success. Your government recognizes that the "Manitoba Advantage" is, in its most concrete terms, a quality of life advantage combined with affordability.

Their ongoing commitment is to make Manitoba one of the most secure and affordable places to raise a family or start a business.

In the last budget, significant tax reductions were delivered to Manitoba families, while new investments were targeted to the services that mean the most to our quality of life – health, education and community development.

The value of family tax credits in Manitoba is the second best in the country. When these are combined with other cost advantages, such as the low cost of housing, low hydro rates and car insurance rates, and the absence of health premiums, Manitoba emerges as one of the best places to live, work and raise a family.

The Manitoba advantage extends to business as well. Tax reductions for small businesses in the spring budget, combined with stable energy rates and low lease costs, provide an advantage that is attracting increasing levels of direct investment in our province.

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Your government is committed to ensuring that the total affordability package for Manitoba remains competitive with other jurisdictions. This includes the commitment they made a year ago to sustainable tax reductions, and their commitment to work with business and labour to build a skilled workforce in Manitoba.

These commitments are part of an overall balance that is responsive to the needs of Manitoba citizens and our province's priorities for the future.

Members of the Legislature and invited guests, before closing I would like to draw your attention to the fact that I am wearing the beautiful medal of our new Order of Manitoba in the Chamber for the first time today. I had the privilege of presiding over the inaugural investiture ceremony earlier this year. At that time twenty-five Manitobans were recognized for outstanding contributions to our province. All members can take great pride in our new provincial order and all Manitobans can participate by nominating worthy fellow citizens for membership.

I would also like to observe that 2001 has been designated the "International Year of Volunteers." No province can equal Manitoba as a centre for commitment to volunteer service. It is one more distinguishing feature of our outstanding quality of life.

I want to thank our guests for joining us today for the start of the new session, and thank our Speaker and all Members of the Legislature for the hard work that lies ahead.

As you proceed to carry out the responsibilities the people of Manitoba have entrusted to you, I trust that Divine Providence will guide your deliberations and your decisions in the best interests of all our citizens.

His Honour, the Lieutenant Governor was then pleased to retire.

PRAYERS

Hon. Mr. DOER, by leave of the House, introduced Bill (No. 1) – An Act Respecting the Administration of Oaths of Office/Loi sur la prestation des serments d'entrée en fonction, which was read a First Time.

Mr. Speaker then informed the House that Daniel VOTH, Maeghan DEWAR, Amber SHESHKA, Danielle DOAN, Cheryl BAYER, Laura MACKINNON, Soraya MUMTAZ and Gavin JOYCE had been appointed Pages for the Second Session of the Thirty-Seventh Legislature.

On motion of Hon. Mr. DOER:

ORDERED that the Speech of His Honour, the Lieutenant Governor be taken into consideration tomorrow.

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Hon. Mr. DOER moved:

THAT this House do now adjourn.

And the Question being put. It was agreed to.

The House then adjourned at 2:15 p.m. until 1:30 p.m. Wednesday, December 6, 2000.

Hon. George HICKES,
Speaker.