



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS No. 1

FOURTH SESSION, THIRTY-EIGHTH LEGISLATURE

1:30 O'CLOCK P.M.

This being the first day of the meeting of the Fourth Session of the Thirty-Eighth Legislature of the Province of Manitoba convoked by Proclamation of His Honour John HARVARD, Lieutenant Governor for the dispatch of business, and the Members of the House being assembled,

His Honour, John HARVARD, was pleased to open the session with the following gracious speech:

Mister Speaker and Members of the Manitoba Legislature:

Welcome to the Fourth session of the Thirty-Eighth Legislative Assembly of the Province of Manitoba.

Our province's strong growth continues, keeping Manitoba one of the best places to live, work, raise a family and start a business.

Our increase in housing values for 2005 is projected to be the highest in Canada. Immigration to our province is at record levels. Manitoba's growth in manufacturing and exports is outpacing the national average. Since 1999, we have recorded Canada's largest increase in university enrolment.

Our current prosperity owes much to hard-working and creative Manitobans, and to forward-looking investments in education, infrastructure and economic opportunity. In the past year we have also been reminded of the value of foresight in planning for, and responding to, unexpected events.

Members of this Legislature wish to thank the community leaders, volunteers and emergency workers who helped protect Manitoba communities from flooding this summer. Members also wish to acknowledge the generous response from thousands of our citizens to natural disasters that took place in southeast Asia, in the southern United States, and in Pakistan.

In a changing world, Manitobans must adapt to meet new challenges and innovate to seize emerging opportunities. Measures will be introduced this year to strengthen emergency planning in Manitoba – building our capacity to manage risk and deal with potential disasters.

At the same time, measures will be introduced to strengthen the foundation for future growth. These measures build on the key elements of Manitoba's *7-Point Growth Strategy*. They include over \$3 billion in clean energy development over the next ten years, one million square feet of new building space in downtown Winnipeg, and significant investments in advanced education for northern and rural Manitoba.

Preparing for Emergencies

Recurrent flooding in Manitoba has made emergency planning a necessity. As early as last January our government was preparing for high summer water levels on Lake Winnipeg. Manitoba Hydro opened all of its control channels at the north end of the Lake, maintaining water levels below what they would be "naturally." But Mother Nature was difficult to contain. By early fall there was still a significant threat of flooding and shore erosion in the event of a wind storm. With the assistance of volunteers, a network of dikes was built around the south basin. This measure protected shoreline communities from the storm which struck on October 5th.

Similar flood threats were experienced in all parts of Manitoba this year, due to unusually heavy mid-summer rains. Dikes were built at Ralls Island outside The Pas, along the banks of the Red River in Winnipeg, and around several communities in southwest Manitoba. Again, local volunteers played a key role, working alongside government and Emergency Measures staff.

This summer, shovels were in the ground to start construction of the Red River Floodway Expansion Project. Supported by a funding partnership with the federal government and an extensive design and environmental review, the new Floodway project will create 1,000 jobs over five years and provide protection against a one-in-700-year flood event. It builds on former Premier Duff Roblin's valuable legacy to Winnipeg and our province.

Prior to beginning the Floodway expansion, the federal and provincial governments invested \$130 million in flood protection for homes and communities south of Winnipeg. Investments in drainage works, which provide the most important defense against flooding in many parts of Manitoba, have increased 44% since 1999.

Manitoba's recent experiences, in combination with disasters we have witnessed outside our borders, have raised public awareness of the value of emergency planning. It is important that we continue to build our capacity to respond to public emergencies – which could include natural disasters, a viral pandemic, or a major disruption to our province's energy supply or communications infrastructure.

Legislation passed in 2002 strengthened emergency protocols in Manitoba, granting new powers to our Chief Medical Officer to deal with public health threats, and requiring every community to put in place an approved local emergency program. Work has been ongoing to improve emergency preparedness, focusing on mitigation efforts, preparation exercises and the development of "business continuity" plans for critical services and infrastructure. New legislation will be introduced this session to enhance our capacity to deal with emergencies.

Planning for a pandemic has received the highest priority. Our Chief Medical Officer has worked with Health Canada over the past 18 months to establish a comprehensive plan for dealing with a pandemic in Manitoba. In the past three years, Regional Health Authorities have developed formal agreements with every municipality in Manitoba, spelling out how resources will be deployed in the event of an emergency. At the request of Manitoba Health, those agreements are now being reviewed by RHAs and municipal officials.

Building on Manitoba's Clean Energy Advantage

Manitobans enjoy the lowest cost of electricity in the world, thanks to the development of our province's hydro-electric capacity. Our citizens remain vulnerable, however, to the rising costs of imported fuels. Natural gas is the heating fuel used in most Manitoba homes, and with the 45% spike in gas prices this summer, winter heating costs have become a major concern.

A *Manitoba Home Heating Strategy* will be introduced to protect consumers from rate shock on their winter gas bills. The current projection is for a rate increase up to 10% on November 1st followed by another increase of up to 20% on February 1st. Our goal is to ensure there is only one rate increase for households in the winter of 2005/06, and that rate increases over the next two winters are manageable.

The *Strategy* reflects new guidelines issued by the Public Utilities Board, and builds on the sound hedging practices Manitoba Hydro has developed to mitigate the impact of price increases. The Board has signaled it will revise its previous order and allow Manitoba Hydro the ability to defer gas price increases. Legislation will be introduced to support this change.

The Manitoba *Strategy* includes an expanded initiative to reduce home heating bills by saving energy, including:

- Home energy audits and energy reduction plans, provided through the new Green Manitoba Eco Solutions office;
- New incentives to support insulation and weatherization upgrades for older homes; purchases of high-efficiency furnaces; and installation of heat pumps; and
- Targeted initiatives to promote energy-saving upgrades by low income households.

The *Manitoba Home Heating Strategy* extends to households some of the benefits that Manitoba will realize from our province's position as a leader in clean energy generation and technology.

Manitoba has been in negotiations with potential customers to the east, the south and the west, to sell more than half a billion dollars in clean energy exports over the next six years. During this session our government will report to the Legislature on the outcome of these negotiations, and their implications for the construction of new generation facilities in Manitoba.

The construction of the Limestone Dam, once the subject of contentious debate in this Chamber, is the reason Manitoba is a major exporter of electricity. Manitoba households have also played a role. Energy conservation measures undertaken through Hydro's PowerSmart program save over 250 megawatts of power annually – power which is made available for export sales.

Moving into a new century, Manitoba's clean energy advantage has been advanced by our province's early commitment to address climate change, and our determination to seize the opportunities of the emerging "green economy."

The coming year will see the completion of Manitoba's first wind farm at St. Leon – a project that adds almost 100 megawatts of emission-free electricity to Manitoba's supply base, invests \$210 million in new capital and generates a total of \$9 million in landholder payments.

The province and Manitoba Hydro will take the next major step in our wind development strategy this fall by requesting proposals for new projects that will total up to 1,000 megawatts of wind generation over the next decade. The estimated capital investment for these projects is over \$2 billion.

Manitoba's Clean Energy Strategy also includes initiatives to expand the production of biofuels. This week, construction is beginning on Husky Oil's new ethanol production plant in Minnedosa. Husky is investing \$145 million in the plant, which will increase ethanol production in Manitoba from 10 million to 130 million litres a year. The project was made possible by a federal support program and the introduction of Manitoba's *Ethanol Mandate* in 2003. Achieving the mandate for 10 per cent blends of gasoline in Manitoba will cut vehicle emissions by 135,000 tonnes – the equivalent of taking 10,000 cars off the road.

Another biofuel initiative is a strategy to ramp up biodiesel production in Manitoba, with a development program designed to support the construction of several community-based production facilities.

Taken together, the hydro, wind, and biofuel developments announced today are worth over \$3 billion to the Manitoba economy. They bring significant new opportunities for rural and northern communities, First Nations, and the youth of our province.

Delivering Better Care, Sooner

Health care reform has been ongoing in Manitoba since 1999, focused on expanding the training and recruitment of nurses and doctors; investing in innovation, capital and equipment; and adding new prevention programs.

A fourth focus of changes in our public health care system is to provide Manitobans with *better care, sooner*. Starting in 2000, Manitoba launched an aggressive plan to reduce wait times for life and death treatments, such as cardiac surgery and radiation treatment for cancer.

For cardiac surgery the wait list was cut in half and the average wait time reduced to two weeks. For cancer treatment the average wait time was reduced from seven weeks to just one week.

Our commitment is to apply the same strategies to reduce wait times for medical procedures affecting citizens' quality of life, and to significantly increase diagnostic procedures such as MRIs and CT scans.

Last year, provinces forged an agreement with the federal government that led to a partial restoration of federal funding for health care. The priorities identified in the *First Ministers' Accord* were cancer treatment, cardiac treatment, joint replacement, sight restoration and diagnostic imaging.

Manitoba's *Wait Time Reduction Strategy* goes beyond the national agreement with four new wait time priorities: children's dental services; mental health programs; pain management; and treatment for sleep disorders. The *Strategy* is designed to increase the volume of services in each of these key areas by adding staff resources and capital, improving primary care and introducing new management practices.

The new *Strategy* builds on health reform efforts begun six years ago. Our government has increased the number of doctors licensed to practice in Manitoba by introducing special programs for foreign-trained doctors, increasing medical college spaces, and providing special loan incentives for Manitoba graduates to set up practice. Since 1999, the province has provided funding to add 23 spaces to the University of Manitoba's medical school.

It takes up to seven years to educate a doctor, and we are just now beginning to see the results of expanded medical education and improved retention of our graduates. There are 235 more doctors registered in Manitoba today than there were in 1999 – following this year's record of 96 new doctors. In the coming year, a co-ordinated recruitment office and webpage will be created to support RHAs and communities in their recruitment efforts.

In 1999 there were two MRIs in this province dedicated to patient care. Since that time, four MRI machines have been installed at Health Sciences Centre, St Boniface Hospital, Brandon Hospital, and – most recently – the Pan Am Clinic. These investments allow four times as many procedures to be performed. In the same period 16 new CT units have been added, doubling the number of scans; and more than 20 new Ultrasounds have been replaced or installed – again, doubling the tests performed. As more machines are added, the demand for diagnostic services grows. Part of our *Wait Times Strategy* is a plan to increase procedures by utilizing equipment in extended hours.

Closer to home treatment is a goal that complements the push for shorter wait times, and is of equal importance to many citizens of Manitoba. Our government has opened new CT units in the communities of The Pas, Thompson, Selkirk, Portage la Prairie, Steinbach, and Winkler. The MRI installed at Brandon Hospital is the first outside the city of Winnipeg. New or expanded dialysis services have been added for the communities of Flin Flon, Garden Hill, Portage la Prairie, and Norway House. Community cancer treatment programs are being established in Neepawa, Deloraine and Pinawa.

Much work has been done to build new, expanded, or renovated hospitals in Swan River, Brandon, Ste. Anne, Portage la Prairie, Beausejour, Gimli, and Steinbach. Additionally, our government has opened new Primary Health Centres in Camperville, Waterhen, Flin Flon, Riverton, Niverville, Sprague, and the RM of Montcalm. More surgical work has been directed to hospitals outside of Winnipeg, allowing for an increase in high-demand procedures such as hip and knee surgeries.

Preventive health is one of the rapidly growing areas of health service. We have introduced laws to help reduce smoking and protect people from second hand smoke. Following on the recommendations of the All-Party *Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Task Force*, the province will work with schools and parents to implement effective nutrition and exercise programs for youth of all ages.

By the end of next year, Manitoba will have replaced all 160 vehicles in the province's ambulance fleet – a significant first step to address Emergency Medical Service issues in rural and northern Manitoba. These new ambulances provide a higher and safer level of care. The entire fleet is outfitted with radios that link all ambulances with all hospitals in the province. Other steps have included the establishment this year of a province-wide EMS Command and Control Centre in Brandon, and measures to address training and wage issues for EMS workers. There is more to do. The responsibility for ambulance costs and fees was devolved to Regional Health Authorities in 1995, resulting in different practices throughout Manitoba. Our government will act to address issues of fairness and equity.

Combating Crime

Manitoba has seen positive improvements in community safety, including a significant drop in arson, improvements to the domestic violence process in the courts, and a two-year decrease in violent crime rates. Yet there are still too many tragedies. Like all Canadians we face serious challenges to reduce violent crime and its horrendous impact on victims.

Where Manitobans have succeeded in addressing the problems of crime, it has been the result of police, community members, and all levels of government working together. An example is Manitoba's innovative *Safer Communities and Neighborhoods Act* and *The Fortified Buildings Act*, which have shut down over 120 fortified buildings, drug dens, and prostitution and sniff houses. The approach will be expanded this year to target the closure of more gang houses.

Manitoba is seen as a national leader in providing services and responses to domestic violence. Last year Manitoba established *A Woman's Place*, a onestop clinic that makes lawyers, social workers and other support services available to victims of domestic violence. A new law will come into force in the coming year to protect a wider range of victims of violence, including persons in dating relationships. Greater assistance will be provided for those who seek protection orders. Courts will be given the power to order abusers to receive counseling and therapy. And a new law will be proposed, the first of its kind in Canada, to enforce protection orders granted by courts in other provinces.

A Manitoba initiative to expedite domestic violence court cases was recently awarded a medal by the Institute of Public Administration of Canada. In 2003, the Provincial Court Chief Judge led the creation of a project that significantly reduced the backlog of domestic violence cases. Over the next year, Manitoba Justice will work with the provincial court to expand this project to deal with all cases where offenders are awaiting trial in custody. The *Front End Project* will ensure that court cases are concluded faster.

We recognize we must do more to counter gangs and prosecute organized crime. Our government has increased Prosecutions funding by 73% since 1999. As a result, 18 new prosecutors have been hired, seven of whom are dedicated to the Gang Prosecutions Unit. The specialized Gangs Prosecutions Unit has achieved 237 convictions or guilty pleas involving gang members since it was put in place in November of 2003.

More will be done. The Gangs Prosecution Unit will be expanded by adding more prosecutors and support staff. The added resources will improve the ability of the unit to target the crimes of gang members.

Our 2005 Budget provided the largest-ever funding increase for policing in Manitoba, adding 54 new officers over the next 2 years. Since 1999 the province has provided funding for an additional 95 police. In addition, in 2006 the City of Winnipeg will receive an estimated \$2 million dollars in unallocated funding to direct towards priorities.

A Special Counsel on organized crime was recently appointed to recommend new legislative and policing measures. We will seek the cooperation of the federal government to strengthen illegal firearm offenses, prohibit the availability of conditional sentences for serious violent crime, and strengthen the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

Other jurisdictions in North America have witnessed the sale and use of the street drug, "crystal meth," grow to crisis proportions. Manitoba has proposed a national strategy to deal with Meth. A first step in our proposed strategy was to have the federal government amend the law to treat trafficking in meth in a similar fashion to cocaine and heroin. We are pleased that the federal government has done this.

Manitoba will implement our own *Meth Strategy*, including measures to restrict the supply and production of the drug, promote collaboration between policing and other agencies, develop public awareness of the dangers of meth, and deal with the consequences of meth use with additional resources for the treatment of meth and other addictions.

We will continue to address the root causes of crime. In 2003, a commitment was made to establish 40 after-school programs in Friendship Centres, community centres and schools. By working together, Manitobans have made this initiative a success. Our commitment to establish 40 Lighthouses will be exceeded. Our government will ensure that these beacons of hope for Manitoba youth are expanded across the province.

Manitoba's commitment to Aboriginal justice in the coming year will include an expansion of Aboriginal policing, added circuit courts in Aboriginal communities, continued devolution of probation services and better access by Aboriginal people to complaint procedures dealing with police conduct.

In response to an intolerably high rate of auto theft, Manitoba has introduced tougher penalties for car thieves and for drivers fleeing police. This year, Manitoba adopted an aggressive strategy to engage citizens in auto theft prevention by installing approved immobilizers in their vehicles. Thousands of Manitobans have signed up for these immobilizers. No car with an approved immobilizer has been stolen.

Preparing Children and Youth for the Future

More than ever before, giving children the best start possible is essential for our province.

Our government has worked hard to improve the quality and availability of child care. Since taking office, our investment in child care has increased by 64%, creating 3,500 newly funded spaces. Manitoba has introduced new training supports for early childhood educators and committed funding to improve wages in the child care field.

In the coming year, my Ministers will announce further steps to improve early years' care, including additional funded spaces, capital investments, and new governance models.

While the earliest years are important to ensure that our children are prepared to enter formal schooling, it is in the school system itself that our students develop the skills that will prepare them for successful lives and careers.

Our government has worked respectfully with parents, teachers and students to improve the quality of elementary and secondary education.

This year school began after Labour Day, allowing families more time together in the last days of summer. Students returned to a system that has been funded at the rate of economic growth since our government was first elected. Funding per student is up 18% since 1999. Many students returned to new or upgraded schools, reflecting the \$333 million invested in the school capital program over six years – more than double the amount invested over the previous six years. Most importantly, our children returned to schools that have benefited from an investment in the quality of learning – including updated curriculum for the sciences, social studies, arts and health education.

Since 1999 there has been a 30% increase in the funding provided for special needs instruction in our schools. This week, the *Appropriate Educational Programming Act* will be proclaimed, following a period of intensive consultations, and with resources in place. This *Act*, and the regulations developed around it, will help schools and parents work together to provide an appropriate education for all children.

Our government recognizes the need to ensure our children have the best possible opportunities to follow their educational and career interests. In the coming year my Ministers will work to provide more experiential learning opportunities for middle years students to increase their engagement with school and their sense of its connection to their future. This year will see the introduction of a classroom-based, teacher-led assessment program in language arts and numeracy in grades 7 and 8. The Technical Vocational Initiative, which introduces students to technical training and career paths, will be expanded. And targeted initiatives will be undertaken through the Aboriginal Education Action Plan to raise school completion rates in northern and inner-city schools.

A new Manitoba Career Guide will be distributed to children and parents, to provide an accessible information source on training and education options. And a new Minister's Award for teaching excellence will recognize and promote the efforts of our most effective teachers and mentors.

Modernizing Post-Secondary Education and Training

Manitoba's success in the world economy depends on the development of our most important resource: the skills of our people.

Since the launch of the College Expansion Initiative in 1999, enrolment in Manitoba colleges and universities has increased by over one-third – the largest increase in Canada. Manitoba campuses have benefited from a new infusion of capital investment sparked by the province's \$100 million commitment announced in 2000. The building program is well underway. This fall, the new downtown campus of Red River College became fully operational, the University of Manitoba opened its new Engineering and Computer Science Centre and the Winnipeg Education Centre opened its new campus on Selkirk Avenue.

These are milestone events for our province, signaling to the youth of Manitoba that effort will be rewarded with opportunity. Our ongoing expansion of education options also signals to Manitoba families, investors and employers that our province is committed to maintain a competitive edge in knowledge and skills.

That commitment extends to all parts of Manitoba. Our government has established a plan for programming and capital to support the expansion of the new University College of the North. Access to education and training is the key to economic opportunities for Aboriginal Manitobans. Our government is also committed to a capital renewal project for Assiniboine Community College, securing its central role in Westman's economic future.

Private sector pledges to support university capital have added to the province's increased investment in advanced education. Our government will seek a similar pledge from the federal government, as part of a national strategy to boost productivity and promote economic inclusion. A new partnership will allow us to commit to additional multi-year funding for Manitoba colleges and universities, incorporating the principles of education *excellence*, *affordability* and *access*. We believe that the recent health care *Accord* is a good model for a national skills partnership.

Growing Rural Manitoba

In rural Manitoba, overland flooding of farmland and the lingering effects of the border closure combined to give agricultural producers another challenging year. To help deal with the crises of today, and seize the opportunities of tomorrow, our government has worked with rural Manitobans in five areas.

First, we are helping producers bridge income and weather-related challenges. Instead of *ad hoc* programs, our government is committed to maintaining a responsive safety net for Manitoba producers. Our government introduced insurance coverage for excessive moisture. Last year the program paid out \$25 million to producers – part of record \$198 million in crop insurance pay outs.

This year excess moisture insurance payments will be \$58 million. The total crop insurance payout is projected to be close to \$300 million. An additional \$15 million for CAIS will be drawn from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund to support farm families.

To deal with income crises in 2004 and 2005, our government introduced a 50% reduction on farmland education taxes. A further 10% will be added for the 2006 school year, bringing the total tax reduction to 60%.

The second part of our rural plan is to work with producers to address the challenges brought about by trade-related issues. Our government has stepped up efforts to address trade disputes, working with other governments in Canada, the United States and Mexico to advocate for a non-partisan dispute-resolution mechanism that would resolve trade disputes in a swift and equitable manner. Manitoba is also working with local producers and businesses to expand trade in both existing and new export markets.

Despite the challenges faced by producers, the underlying strength of the rural economy was borne out by the record \$3.4 billion in agri-food exports shipped in 2004, and the growing list of new, value-added facilities in Manitoba. This represents the third part of our rural plan.

“*Farm it in Manitoba; finish it in Manitoba*” is the slogan for a trend that is seeing farmers and rural communities gain increased control over food production. We are working to expand hog and beef processing in the province, complementing the Simplot potato plant. Manitoba’s new Growing Opportunities initiative is assisting producers and rural communities to capture greater value from agricultural commodities. An economic development officer is now in place in each of the province’s ten GO teams. This year, our government will consult with rural Manitobans about the use of these new resources to further economic development, and the next steps to achieve value-added opportunities.

The fourth part of our plan is innovations that create economic development. The future of food production in Manitoba is also supported by a research and product development strategy that includes the Functional Foods and Nutraceuticals Centre at the University of Manitoba and the newly-expanded Food Development Centre. A “Farm to Fork” food safety program is being introduced this year, under the supervision of the Office of the Chief Veterinarian. It will provide an added level of assurance to support the made-in-Manitoba brand. This year our government will also develop initiatives designed to expand organic farming in our province.

Finally, our government has developed a framework to ensure that rural Manitoba shares in the benefits of the green economy and that rural growth is environmentally sustainable. In the coming year, our government will become the first province in Canada to develop a project to support farms in carrying out a range of environmentally friendly farming practices and alternative land uses. This project will support the agricultural community in its commitment to protect water quality, healthy soils, and wildlife habitats.

Consultations with producer groups and municipalities are underway to implement a new approach to land use – linking water quality protection principles to local planning decisions. To support these initiatives, your government will establish new soil survey teams to work on established work plans and conduct *ad hoc* surveys for site-specific proposals. At the same time, enhanced water quality standards are being introduced for septic fields and municipal sewer treatment, and Manitoba is supporting a multipronged research and protection strategy for the Lake Winnipeg watershed.

Manitoba’s Agri-Energy Office is working with rural communities and investors to develop new opportunities for wind generation, ethanol and biodiesel generation. A promising new development is the discovery of additional oil reserves in southwestern Manitoba, which will lead to a \$200 million investment in new pipeline and separation facilities. Manitoba is working with the industry to ensure a level playing field for exploration and development in our province.

Another promising development is a five-year permit for potash exploration in the Ste. Lazare area, issued to the Agrium corporation. Under the terms of the permit, Agrium will invest at least \$200,000 annually in exploration work.

To further promote innovation in rural Manitoba, two new scholarships will be established this year: a *Centennial Scholarship* to the University of Manitoba’s Faculty of Agriculture and Food Sciences; and a *Rural Economic Development Scholarship* at Brandon University.

Building Northern Manitoba

Since 1999, our government has insured that the North receives a fair share of provincial funding for highways and transportation infrastructure. New partnerships have been forged with Manitoba First Nations to pursue opportunities in energy development and natural resources. And significant investments have been made to ensure that both medical services and education opportunities are available *closer-to-home* for northern residents.

In 2004 the University College of the North was created, establishing a degree-granting post-secondary institution designed to serve the educational needs of northern communities. Currently, there are 2,250 students registered in over forty programs – offered in locations throughout northern Manitoba. The programs include a Bachelor of Nursing degree, which currently has over 180 students registered. This fall a Bachelor of Arts programs was started and in 2007 a Bachelor of Education program will be launched. Future years will see the introduction of degree programs in Science and Aboriginal Midwifery.

This fall, Manitoba will propose a partnership with the federal government designed to make an immediate and significant impact on Aboriginal health outcomes. The elements of this strategy include:

- Chronic disease educators, to address factors leading to diabetes;
- Staff dedicated to pre-natal and post-natal care and education in every reserve community;
- Telehealth links on all reserves, with training for staff, to provide faster diagnosis and reduce the need for medivacs;
- Retinal scanning for all northerners at risk of macular degeneration; and
- Aggressive screening for, and treatment of, tuberculosis.

Manitoba will propose similar partnerships to boost school completion rates on-reserve and begin addressing the critical shortage of adequate housing in northern and First Nation communities. Our government is committed to involving First Nations directly in this partnership, and to a holistic approach that recognizes the root factors of cultural identity and language.

Our government has gathered input from First Nations communities on the East Side of Lake Winnipeg on their priorities for transportation, land use planning, economic development and a sustainable future for their children. Here too we are seeking a partnership that involves all levels of government. The goals of the partnership include upgrades to the Wasagamack Airport, community programs for energy efficiency and home retrofit, and training for locally-based resource management and tourism.

To address the impact of rising energy costs on northern residents, an *Energy Cost Benefit* will be added to the existing remoteness allowance.

Revitalizing Cities

Our government has worked with communities and the private sector to revitalize our large urban centers. Investments in Winnipeg and Brandon have included major health and education capital, downtown revitalization, recreation facilities, and transportation and clean water infrastructure.

While there were divisions within the community, and indeed within this chamber, the MTS Centre in downtown Winnipeg has proved to be a great success. By the end of this month it is estimated that the first 1,000,000 people will have attended an event at the arena since it opened in November of 2004. In terms of concert sales, the MTS Centre is 4th in Canada, and 20th in the world. With new projects such as the Manitoba Hydro building, the Credit Union Central Building, the Millennium Library, and the Asper building, over a million square feet will be developed in downtown Winnipeg over the next three years.

To help further the sustainable growth of Winnipeg, our government will continue to work with the City of Winnipeg and the private sector towards opening up new housing lots. This session, your government will introduce legislation to dedicate our profits from Waverley West and other suburban developments to inner-city housing. These dedicated funds will add to the impact of our investments in housing, and programs like Neighbourhoods Alive! and Building Communities.

Brandon has recently benefited from the expansion of the Keystone Centre and the Brandon Hospital redevelopment. This year the province will be moving ahead with the substantial or full relocation of the Assiniboine Community College to the former Brandon Mental Health Centre site. Our government continues to work with City officials, ACC officials, the private sector and the community as a whole, to ensure that the move is cost effective in meeting the needs of future students.

Our government will expand and improve the 18th Street Bridge in Brandon. We will work with the federal government to see that the work proceeds as quickly as possible.

Cities across Manitoba have seen the benefits of new investment: from highway projects for Selkirk, to a new personal care home in Thompson, to wastewater treatment facilities in Dauphin, Gimli and Winkler. In Portage la Prairie there will be an expansion of the Food Development Centre, a sewage pumping station, and landfill and sewer upgrades.

Municipal transit grants increased by 15% this year, for the first time in a decade. Earlier in the year, the *Building Manitoba Fund* was announced, providing a significant increase in funding for municipalities. In the next few months municipalities will be reporting back to the province on how this funding was spent. The Building Manitoba Fund is unique to Canada, as it includes growth revenues in its formula. According to the most recent Statistics Canada report, the Province of Manitoba is the second most generous supporter of municipalities per capita.

Empowering Citizens

Nothing is more important for a child's well-being than a sense of security. Our government will expand efforts to combat bullying in schools over the coming months, enacting programs recommended by educators and parents. Our government will also act to promote life-long healthy eating habits among children.

Over the past six years, our government has worked to address issues of personal and financial security for seniors. In the coming year new or expanded initiatives will assist seniors' efforts to maintain their health and independence – *Aging in Place*, *Healthy Aging* and a *Falls Prevention* program.

Security in the workplace remains a priority. Improvements to workplace safety over the past four years have resulted in a 21% decline in time lost due to injuries. We are on track to meet our target of a 25% reduction by next year. In the coming days, new regulations will come into force to improve coverage for firefighters under the *Workers Compensation Act*. Proposals will also be introduced this session to modernize Manitoba's *Employment Standards Code* – the first such effort in over thirty years. The changes are designed to reflect trends in the modern workforce, such as introduction of new technologies, and the demands placed on today's families.

Our government has acted to reduce poverty and improve opportunities for low-income Manitobans. Since 1999, the hourly minimum wage has increased to \$7.25 – a 21% increase – restoring the purchasing power that was lost in the 1990s. As well, due to our tax credit programs, more than 27,000 low-income Manitobans have come off provincial income tax rolls.

Since 1999, our government has also restored the National Child Benefit to income assistance recipients, established Healthy Child Manitoba, created a new pre-natal benefit, increased income assistance rates, and created 26 Parent-Child Centres. We will continue to act to provide safety and opportunity for Manitoba families. This session, new legislation will be introduced to regulate payday loan companies.

Empowering citizens also means improving access to the democratic process and improving the transparency of government. This session, our government will be proceeding with changes to modernise Manitoba's Elections Acts. The changes are designed to increase voter participation by reducing the barriers some face in casting a ballot. Our government will also examine ways to increase democratic participation among Aboriginal citizens and youth.

Since 1999, our government has met its commitments under Manitoba's Balanced Budget law, which requires that each year tax-supported programs be balanced with tax revenues. In 2001, for the first time ever, we published a Summary Budget for Manitoba including crowns and other public agencies in the provincial budget presentation. Working with the Auditor General, our government will act to make the Summary Budget the principal report on provincial finances by 2007, fully incorporating Generally Accepted Accounting Principles into our annual budgets.

Since 1999, Manitoba has acted to fulfill our province's obligations under Treaty Land Entitlement and transfer land back to First Nations. Addressing TLE transfers is a priority of our government, and is directly related to First Nations economic development. We are working with other levels of government to reduce delays in the TLE process.

Growing Manitoba's Economy

Affordability for families and businesses remains one of the key elements of the Manitoba advantage. Manitobans currently enjoy the lowest electricity costs and among the lowest auto insurance premiums in North America. Income taxes have been steadily reduced since 1999. We will implement a further rate cut on January 1st 2006, achieving a total reduction for middle income taxes of 19% over 5 years.

Affordability has also improved for Manitoba businesses. Corporate tax rates were 17% when our government took office in 1999. They have been reduced to 15% this year, and will fall to 14.5% on January 1st of next year and then to 14% in 2007. Small business taxes have fallen from 8% to 5%, and will be reduced to 4.5% in 2006 and 4% in 2007.

A recent court ruling in Manitoba has raised the issue of the division of roles between architects and engineers, and threatened to slow the pace of construction in our province. Our government has worked to establish a new co-operative agreement between the two professions. Failing that, we will introduce legislation to ensure that building projects are not impeded.

Our government continues to work within the framework of the *7 Point Growth Strategy*, which was developed in partnership with the Premier's Economic Advisory Council and leaders from every sector of the Manitoba economy.

Alongside our skills strategy, one of the cornerstones of the *Growth Strategy* is an initiative to increase immigration to Manitoba. Our target is 10,000 immigrants per year to Manitoba. Last year's total of 7,427 – an increase of 14% over the previous year – is a result of the successful redesign of our Provincial Nominee Program and the community co-ordination work led by the new Manitoba Immigration Council.

Manitoba will increase support for community-based settlement services this year, and seek a level of federal support for immigration services similar to that provided in Quebec and Ontario. Qualifications recognition will remain a priority task, with a focus on engineering, nursing, occupational therapy and the trades.

Another element of the Growth Strategy is partnerships to develop the lead sectors of our economy. Our government is working with Manitoba manufacturers to build upon and expand our Advanced Manufacturing Initiative. We are working with the investment community to refocus our capital markets and expand financing for early stage ventures.

A leadership council is being formed this fall to launch BioMed City – a community-led initiative to establish our province as the Canadian centre for public health research and innovation. The development of a new health industry cluster comes at an opportune time, as many of Manitoba's investments in research, infrastructure and human capital are coming to fruition. Winnipeg is now home to over 120 public health innovation firms, and to a core group of internationally-renowned researchers in infectious and chronic diseases. The development of our biomedical sector complements the strong growth of Manitoba's biopharmaceutical industry.

With the challenge of our rising dollar, and growing competition for markets, our government has paid special attention to Manitoba's export industries. Manitoba has teamed up with neighbouring U.S. states to propose alternatives to a passport requirement for border crossings. Our government has also committed to change our Daylight Savings Act, to keep in synch with our major markets and tourism partners.

Trade routes themselves are another key factor. As the northern link in the International Mid-Continent Trade and Transportation Corridor, Manitoba is positioned to be an important partner in a three-country trade relationship worth \$723 billion annually. A focus of our province's international strategy is the development of a recognized trade corridor stretching from the Port of Churchill down to Mexico.

The year 2005 has been declared the *Year of the Veteran*. In closing I want to pay special tribute to those citizens of Manitoba and Canada who fought to preserve our freedoms and lay the groundwork for the vast opportunities we, as Manitobans, enjoy.

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 in the best interests of all our citizens.

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

PRAYERS

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

Mr. Speaker then informed the House that Mr. Daniel WINSTANLEY, Mr. Nicholas DUPUIS, Ms. Gillian THORNTON, Ms. Alannah HALLAS, Ms. Hemali VYAS, Mr. Chad JACOBSON, Mr. Ryan FOYLE, Ms. Monica DE CASTRO had been appointed Pages for the Fourth Session of the Thirty-Eighth Legislature.

On motion of Hon. Mr. DOER:

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

Thursday, October 27, 2005

Hon. Mr. DOER moved:

THAT this House do now adjourn.

And the Question being put. It was agreed to.

The House then adjourned at 2:36 p.m. until 10:00 a.m. Friday, October 28, 2005.

Hon. George HICKES,
Speaker.