



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS No. 2

FIRST SESSION, THIRTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE

PRAYERS

1:30 O'CLOCK P.M.

His Honour PETER LIBA, was pleased to address us with the following gracious speech:

MISTER SPEAKER AND MEMBERS OF THE MANITOBA LEGISLATURE:

I welcome you to the first session of the thirty-seventh Legislative Assembly of the Province of Manitoba.

It is my honour to present the first Speech from the Throne following the general election held September 21, which resulted in the election of a new provincial government.

The people of Manitoba have provided their new government with a clear mandate. They expect improvements to our health care system. They expect our young people to be prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the new economy. They expect improved security in our homes, in our workplaces and in our communities.

And they expect to have a real say in how we reach these goals.

Our newly-elected representatives gather today in this Legislature to begin carrying out their mandate from the people.

Thanks to our elders and ancestors, they have a strong base on which to build. Looking back over the century now ending, it is inspiring to reflect on what Manitobans have accomplished by working together.

A hundred years ago, most young Manitobans had only three or four years of formal education and very few had the opportunity to attend college or university. Childbirth itself was a serious risk for mothers, and a family illness could lead to financial ruin.

A hundred years later, despite a severe depression and two world wars, we have created a Manitoba where families have much greater economic security and where we all enjoy the right to be treated equally. Our collective investment in public health care and education, in modern infrastructure, electrification, transport and scientific research has helped create a wealthier and more secure province.

This is the legacy left to us by earlier generations of Manitobans, who dedicated themselves to the task of building a better society.

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Now, with a new century about to begin, the responsibility for building a better society for our children and grandchildren has fallen to us.

Undoubtedly the new century will bring with it a new set of challenges. Already, technological advances are placing a new emphasis on retraining and lifelong learning. The advent of global competition is opening up new opportunities for trade and wealth creation, as well as raising new threats to our environment and the stability of our communities. And constraints on public finances have forced us to carefully consider and focus the public investments we make.

In meeting the challenges of the next century, however, we are still guided by the example of foresight and cooperative effort set by those who went before us. We share their commitment to increasing the prosperity of our province and to steadily expanding the circle of those who look to the future with hope and anticipation.

In every region of our province there are special challenges to be met and opportunities to realize.

The vast potential of Manitoba's North still lies before us. We are determined to achieve that potential, with a renewed commitment to northern economic development and a readiness to seize new opportunities in resource development, tourism, and an exciting partnership with the Territory of Nunavut.

We are also determined to work with Manitoba First Nations to ensure that they share in the benefits of future development.

In rural Manitoba, we have a unique and pressing challenge. Due to foreign subsidies, the family farm is facing its greatest threat in a generation. We cannot solve the prairie farm crisis alone, but we must take every opportunity to work with the federal government and Manitoba farmers to preserve the vitality of our rural communities.

In our major urban centres, Winnipeg and Brandon, we also face serious challenges. Our downtown commercial areas and our older city neighborhoods need revitalization. These are the historic crossroads of our province, the places where Manitobans meet to exchange goods, information and ideas.

To re-energize our city centres we will need to work closely with local residents and businesses, and concentrate the resources of all three levels of government.

Your government takes up these challenges fully aware of existing constraints. The preliminary report of the independent audit into the province's finances makes clear that our resources are limited. And the people of Manitoba have made clear that they expect their government to live within its means.

This is not an unrealistic expectation, however. In the recent election, Manitobans voted for a set of commitments that is focused and achievable. They voted for improvements in the basic services that government provides and for sustainable tax reduction.

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Your government has already begun to act on these commitments, by taking on the task of health, education and justice reforms and by following through on the 1.5% reduction in provincial income tax that will take effect on January 1, 2000. Notwithstanding the present constraints, your government is committed to further reductions to property and small business taxes.

As we continue along this path, the challenges will increase. But we should not feel daunted. Recent events have shown what Manitobans working together can achieve.

Two years ago, we united to fight the flood of the century. Thanks to a public investment made forty years ago, and thanks to the efforts of our workers and citizen volunteers, half a million homes were protected from the rising waters of the Red River.

There is still some work to be done to ensure that Manitobans who fell victim to the flood have their homes and their lives restored. But the spirit shown during that tense spring remains an inspiration.

Last summer we demonstrated our community spirit in a different way, by hosting the most successful Pan Am Games ever held. All of our citizens can take pride in the success of the Games. They showcased the kind of volunteer effort that goes on every day in every community across this province -- in our community clubs, in our schools, in our hospitals and in our seniors' centres.

By working together as a single community Manitobans overcame the flood of the century and hosted the Americas as only we can. With the same spirit, we can meet the challenges we now face in health care and education, in making our citizens more secure in their homes and communities, and in expanding participation in our economy and our democracy.

Our first priority as a community is to rescue our health care system.

Quality public health care is one of the legacies left to us through the determined efforts of earlier generations. We must ensure that this legacy is preserved, improved and passed on to our children.

In particular, we must ensure that health care is available to Manitobans when they need it and where they need it, and that those who enter our health care facilities are treated with dignity and respect.

As a first step, the provincial government has committed:

- to a strategy for ending the treatment of patients in hallways; and
- to a reduction in waiting lists for diagnostic tests and surgery.

Several initiatives are already underway to meet these commitments. As quickly as we can, we must end the indignity of receiving treatment in a hospital corridor. We must reduce the agonizing wait Manitobans and their families have endured between the diagnosis for cancer and the start of treatment.

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While responding to priority needs in patient care, your government has also committed to address province-wide shortages of health professionals:

- by hiring full-time nursing staff and expanding nurse training; and
- by establishing new programs that will attract and retain health professionals for our northern and rural communities.

Our longer term challenge is to contain rising costs and move to a model of community health care. Already steps have been taken to reduce bureaucracy in the health sector. Further steps will soon be taken:

- to invest in preventive and early childhood health programs; and
- to strengthen our home care system.

Another priority for Manitoba is to build a modern, responsive education system that will prepare our youth for the challenges of the new economy.

Today the best economic policy for any province is a strong education policy. Employers are attracted by an educated, skilled workforce. And citizens who are skilled in learning will have the ability to adapt to an economy that is constantly changing.

Because education is the key to economic participation, special effort must also be made to improve learning opportunities for Aboriginal Manitobans and others who have been excluded from the economic mainstream.

The Manitoba government is committed:

- to doubling college spaces in Manitoba over the next five years; and
- to making post-secondary education more affordable, so that the hopes of our young people for a college or university degree are based on ability and effort, not finances.

The Manitoba government is also committed to giving all children a fair start in life, through the opportunity of quality schooling. This commitment includes:

- stable and predictable investments in our public schools;
- a guarantee that parents will receive an assessment of their child's math and reading skills at the beginning of the grade 3 year; and
- new child-parent centres in targeted schools.

A third priority for Manitoba is to increase our citizens' sense of security.

Security, like education and health care, is a basic human need and a prerequisite to full participation in society.

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As a first step, we must ensure that Manitobans feel safe in their homes and in their neighborhoods, and that our justice system is working for all our citizens. We must also strive to create a broader sense of security, working with citizens to create safe workplaces, stable neighborhoods, and a clean environment.

To improve public safety, your government has committed:

- to establish a new gang unit in the prosecutions branch; and
- to introduce stiffer penalties for car theft.

At the same time, your government is committed to creating positive alternatives for youth who may be at risk of committing crimes. Initial steps include:

- opening schools at nights and on weekends to ensure that every neighbourhood has safe places to play and to learn; and
- increasing opportunities for youth to participate in community sports.

The safety of Manitoba children is a particular concern for our citizens. In the coming session, reforms will be introduced to make our legal system more sensitive to the needs of child victims.

Additionally, the Manitoba government will continue to urge the federal government to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that federal laws prohibiting the possession of child pornography remain enforceable – including, if there is absolutely no other alternative, resorting to the “notwithstanding clause” in our constitution. While Manitobans recognize that resort to this provision should only be made in the most extreme circumstances, we believe that the protection of our most vulnerable population, our children, is one such circumstance.

The Manitoba government is committed to creating a justice system that is responsive and fair to all citizens:

- by acting on the first recommendation of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, which is the establishment of a joint Implementation Committee;
- by moving immediately on community justice initiatives in First Nations communities;
- by improving compensation for victims of crime and guaranteeing the right of victims to make an Impact Statement before the courts; and
- by improving the enforcement of workplace safety regulations, to ensure that Manitobans trying to earn a living do not put their health or safety at risk.

Your government recognizes that, for most Manitobans, security means more than just the safety of their person. It means a sense of confidence in the future, for themselves and for their communities. Your government will address the broader security needs of Manitobans:

- by aiding local initiatives to stem neighborhood decline, through improved housing and community safety measures; and
- by standing up for Manitoba farmers to restore national farm programs and ensure a viable future for the family farm in Manitoba.

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This latter commitment, I am pleased to note, is supported by all parties in the Manitoba Legislature, which have stood together in efforts to secure a better deal for Manitoba farmers.

Another matter that is of paramount concern to Manitobans is the security of our natural environment. The easy access we enjoy to pristine cottage and wilderness areas is a marvel for visitors to our province and an attraction that keeps many of our own citizens rooted here. There is still much we can do to make the most of this natural advantage, by expanding our network of provincial trails and marketing Manitoba as a major destination for eco-tourism and outdoor recreation.

Our first duty, however, is to ensure that the quality of Manitoba's environment remains secure. Your government will take immediate steps to protect our water resources and preserve our lakes, rivers and streams. New legislation will be introduced to protect water quality throughout Manitoba and to ban the bulk removals of our water. And your government will continue working with Manitoba communities to maintain a vigilant opposition to North Dakota water projects that threaten our environment.

The health of our democracy depends on continual efforts to expand participation in decision-making and build trust among citizens. In particular, citizens need to participate in the decisions that affect them directly, or that affect the communities in which they live. And they need to feel that their voice and their role are respected.

The Manitoba government has committed:

- to give Manitobans a direct say in any proposed sale of our Crown Corporations;
- to increase citizens' input into regional health authority decisions and environmental licensing; and
- to eliminate corporate and union contributions to political parties.

The Manitoba government is also committed to preventing forms of social exclusion that take root in a child's earliest years. The rate of child and family poverty in Manitoba is unacceptable. We need a multi-faceted approach to address poverty effectively. Your government is committed to:

- an annual review of the minimum wage;
- aid for neighborhood efforts to improve housing and community safety;
- creating parent-child centres and putting nurses in schools;
- providing increased access to recreation through after hours school programs and community sports; and
- helping to develop and implement the federal government's new national strategy for reducing child poverty.

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Respect for all sectors of the community will be a hallmark of your government's approach to its priorities. The Manitoba government has pledged:

- to hold a summit on the future of the Manitoba economy that will allow business, labour and government to sit down together and forge a new strategy for economic development;
- to listen carefully to the concerns of patients and care-givers in our health system and ensure that they are a major part of the process of health care reform; and
- to bring together parents, teachers, students and employers in the ongoing task of modernizing our education system.

At the same time, your government has promised:

- to build a new relationship with Manitoba's First Nations, based on cooperation and a recognition of the needs, the aspirations and the rights of aboriginal peoples;
- to continue implementing the recommendations of the Chartier Report; and
- to work with our multicultural communities, the federal government, and the business community to achieve a significant increase in immigration to Manitoba.

These commitments are rooted in a sense of who we are and where we come from. For more than 300 years Manitoba's First Nations have enabled peoples from many distant lands to call this province home. To Cree, Ojibway, Dakota, Dene, Mitchif, Inuktitut, we have added all the languages of Europe and many of Asia and Africa.

We Manitobans are different, one from another, in our origins, the colour of our skin, our languages and our political perspective. But we have built a society where those differences can be valued. We are united by our sense of community, by the welcome we offer newcomers and by our pride in our many ways of life.

These are the goals your government has set itself, to carry out your mandate and meet the expectations of Manitoba's citizens. They are concrete goals, and they are achievable. They *will* be achieved by working together with Manitobans, with the common purpose of building a better future for ourselves and our children.

We cannot know with certainty what the next century will mean for Manitoba. But we do know that changes in the global economy and the rapid transformations of technology will have an impact on every citizen. Our government is confident we can face that future secure in the knowledge that our collective institutions, our diversity, and the respect we hold for one another will be our strengths in the new millenium.

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.

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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 Garry CLARK had been appointed Acting Sergeant-at-Arms for the First Session of the Thirty-Seventh Legislature and Dennis HUYDA had been appointed Acting Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms.

Mr. Speaker then informed the House that Courtney MARION, Kate MOSSMAN, Irene LEMIEUX-ROBINSON, Rebecca TURNER, Vincent HO, Orion PENNER, Brooke COGGAN and Amanda WOWRYK had been appointed Pages for the First Session of the Thirty-Seventh Legislature.

On motion of Hon. Mr. DOER:

THAT a Special Committee consisting Peter George DYCK, Marcel LAURENDEAU, Harold GILLESHAMMER, Hon. Gordon MACKINTOSH, Hon. Steve ASHTON, Tom NEVAKSHONOFF and Nancy ALLAN be appointed to prepare lists of members to compose the Standing Committees provided under sub-rule 81(1).

On motion of Hon. Mr. DOER:

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

Hon. Mr. DOER moved:

THAT this House do now adjourn.

And the Question being put,

It was agreed to.

The House then adjourned at 2:08 p.m. until 10:00 p.m. Friday, November 26, 1999.

Hon. George HICKES,
Speaker.