



Speech from the Throne



At the Opening of the
First Session of the
40th Legislature

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Delivered by:

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Lieutenant Governor of the
Province of Manitoba

Mr. Speaker and members of the Manitoba Legislature:

I welcome you to the first session of the 40th Legislative Assembly of the Province of Manitoba.

The October 4th General Election resulted in the largest number of newly-elected Members this Assembly has seen in over a decade. Each of you – new members, returning members, and indeed all candidates for election – are to be commended for putting your names forward to serve the people of Manitoba.

The election entrusted our government with a new mandate. We are aware of the privilege that has been granted by the citizens of our province and the important responsibilities that come with that privilege.

This is a great time to be a Manitoban. We are rebuilding our province, more people are working here than ever before, people are coming home, and people are training for the jobs of tomorrow. Manitobans are building their futures in this province – for themselves, their children and their grandchildren. Our government will work with them to ensure the great potential of our province continues to unfold.

To help the province keep moving forward, the next four years will be focused on the key priorities that were presented to Manitobans during the election:

- making health care even better;
- expanding job, education and training opportunities;
- entrenching Manitoba's affordability advantage;
- making our communities safer and healthier;
- protecting our environment; and
- building Manitoba Hydro as a public asset and a benefit to all of our citizens.

Over the next four years, this house will be presented with measures to address each of these priorities.

Health care is the number one priority of Manitobans, and our government will never lose sight of this fact. More doctors, nurses and other health care professionals have been hired to help reduce wait times and provide better health care. Hospitals, clinics, and personal care homes have been renewed or rebuilt. And we have found ways to make the provincial health system more efficient while improving patient care.

To advance our goal of providing better health care, closer to home, our government will take action on a number of fronts.

We will implement all three priorities identified by the Canadian Cancer Society, including making cancer treatment and support drugs free – with no patient deductibles.

Our government committed to give Manitobans the fastest access in Canada to world-class cancer screening, testing and treatment. To that end, we have begun the most comprehensive and aggressive cancer wait-time strategy in Canada. As part of this plan, more specialists will be added to speed up testing and diagnosis, and we will begin transforming rural chemotherapy sites into full CancerCare hubs to better support patients during their cancer journey.

Our world class home care system will be further enhanced with more in-home services and specialist visits. Doctors, nurse practitioners and other health professionals will work to maintain the health of seniors so they can remain in their own homes longer. Our personal care home construction program will make more spaces available for those families that need them.

Our healthcare professionals are fundamental to further improvements in patient care. In the coming year, the first steps will be taken in our four-year plan to:

- hire 2,000 new nurses and nurse practitioners, and take the necessary steps to educate new nurses;
- hire 200 more doctors and 50 more physician assistants; this will also require the creation of 22 medical residencies; and
- hire more technologists and other front line health care staff to keep our system among the best in the world.

Our goal in the coming years is to ensure that every Manitoban that wants one will have access to a family doctor. In addition to educating and hiring more doctors and nurse practitioners, our government will open new primary care clinics, access centers and QuickCare clinics throughout Manitoba. More nurse practitioners will be recruited specifically to work in rural and northern communities.

Towns and cities throughout Manitoba will see more improvements in health care – from ambulance stations in Ile des Chenes and St Laurent, to telehealth sites in Camperville and Waterhen, to clinics in Ste Rose, Swan River and Lundar. MRIs will be added in Dauphin, Selkirk, and west Winnipeg. The Brandon hospital, the Flin Flon Emergency Room and other health facilities will be expanded and renewed.

These changes will not only improve health care for Manitobans, they will also make the system more efficient and effective. Investments in northern health services will save close to 1,000 patient trips to and from Winnipeg every year.

Manitobans know that the prosperity and security of our families and our province stems from a commitment to education and training.

As a centerpiece of this commitment, our government has committed to reduce class sizes for kindergarten to grade three to a maximum of 20 students. The plan will be developed this coming year with an implementation committee composed of parents, teachers and administrators. Implementation will begin in 2012.

Our government will ensure that Manitoba families have access to safe, convenient child care, which is essential to improving education and employment opportunities for parents. Over the next four years, new child care centres will be built, new spaces will be added to existing centres, and the salaries of child care workers will be increased to help attract workers to this vital area.

Our work to modernize education facilities – with new schools, new science labs, and new gyms – will continue. Additionally, we will upgrade shop equipment in our schools to provide greater training opportunities, and work with rural divisions to increase access to broadband internet.

Programs aimed at helping students stay in school until they are 18 will be strengthened by new initiatives to help the private sector employ more apprentices. Skilled trades training will be expanded in rural Manitoba and a *Journey Person Business Start Program* will provide support for rural and northern Manitobans to start their own businesses.

A new skilled trades and technology centre will be built at Red River College for high demand trades like carpentry, electrical and plumbing.

New opportunities for education and training will help keep our communities healthier and safer. We will also enhance crime prevention in our province by developing programs with community partners for after-school programming. Apprenticeships and mentoring opportunities provide positive alternatives for at-risk youth.

We also know we need to meet the challenges of safer communities head-on with new resources for policing and with clearer consequences for lawbreakers. Over the coming years, our government will add 50 more police to the streets of Winnipeg, and 25 cadets specifically for the downtown. There will also be 50 more police and 25 cadets stationed in rural and northern Manitoba. We will work with municipalities and First Nations to improve fire fighting capacity in this province.

Offenders will be moved through the system quicker, as more prosecutors are hired and as the weekend court gets underway. We will work with the federal government to strengthen the criminal code and we will propose specific changes, including making gang recruitment an explicit crime, and cracking down on knife crimes, arson, home invasions and carjackings.

We will work with police agencies to expand the electronic monitoring bracelet program.

Manitoba is one of the most affordable places to live, study, work, and raise a family. People come from around the world to enjoy these advantages.

All families will benefit from our guarantee that Manitobans will continue to pay the lowest combined bills for electricity, home heating, and auto insurance in Canada.

In addition:

- our government will continue to take more businesses off the tax rolls and ensure regular and sustainable increases in the minimum wage;
- the successful All Aboard poverty reduction strategy will continue to take innovative steps to reduce poverty in our province;
- seniors and farm owners will benefit from the elimination of the school tax on seniors and farmland; and
- all Manitobans will benefit from more incentives to support energy efficiency home improvements.

We will continue to provide stable funding for universities and low tuition for university students. Legislation will be enacted to freeze tuition increases to the rate of inflation, interest rates on student loans will be reduced to prime, and student aid rules will be amended to ensure our youth can graduate with a reduced debt burden. This will further encourage young people to stay in Manitoba to start their careers and families.

Our government will work with the private sector to increase the number of rental units in downtown Winnipeg and throughout the province. Surface parking lots in downtown Winnipeg will be redeveloped. A major expansion of the Convention Centre will help to continue the renaissance that is occurring in our downtown.

Recreational opportunities are essential to a high quality of life and healthy communities. Our government's five-year plan to renew and improve our parks and campgrounds will continue. Other initiatives will ensure that all Manitobans have the opportunity to benefit from sports and active living – from world class soccer facilities, to splash pads and playgrounds, to the University of Winnipeg and Dakota Community Center field houses, to a variety of projects in rural and northern Manitoba.

Our natural heritage is also essential to the quality of life in this province. Our government will follow through on the unanimous vote of this house to protect our water, including expanding the moratorium on unsustainable hog industry practices.

Manitobans have assessed competing plans of how to protect our lakes and rivers, and have endorsed a plan that requires all people – in all sectors of the province – to do their part to prevent pollution from entering our waterways. We will work with Manitoba's towns, cities and municipalities to ensure continued progress on water protection. We will work with agribusiness to find ways to protect our water and the sector's future prosperity. We will develop a surface-water management strategy to help deal with flooding and reduce the pollution that is killing our lakes.

Our government will keep Manitoba Hydro strong and public, and moving forward with expansion plans that will keep Hydro growing. We will ensure that Bipole III is built on the West Side of Lake Winnipeg to preserve our boreal forest, ensure our long-term security and enable Manitoba Hydro to continue to sell its power at a premium to the United States.

We will also build new hydro generating capacity, including the Keeyask and Conawapa dams, in partnership with First Nations. These major building projects – the largest in our province's history – will create 25,000 person years of employment, allow us to expand profitable energy exports, and keep rates low for Manitoba families and businesses.

In order to capitalize on the significant opportunities created by hydro expansion, our government will establish a *Manitoba Energy Jobs Fund* to help Manitoba companies expand and to attract international companies to create jobs in our province. The fund will promote the development of hydro and other clean energy options in Manitoba.

Our government was elected to secure a stronger future for Manitoba, building on the many strengths we share and facing up squarely to our challenges. We have some serious challenges in front of us. The flood of 2011, the most widespread flood event in memory, is far from over. Many Manitobans remain out of their homes and many others are working to restore their properties. Continuing high water levels raise the risk of further storm damage this fall and more flooding next spring.

To reduce this risk, work is underway to dig an emergency channel that will lower the levels of Lake St. Martin and Lake Manitoba. Work is also ongoing to help citizens repair the damage caused by the flood and to install new flood protection.

Plans to remove the single desk role of the Canadian Wheat Board have long-term consequences for Manitoba—for Winnipeg as a major hub of the grain industry, for farmers and farming communities, for the future of the Port of Churchill, and for Manitoba's role as a centre of grain research. In the coming weeks, a community coalition will travel to Ottawa to highlight these issues and seek solutions.

The uncertain state of the global economy may present new challenges to our province in the months and years to come. The Manitoba economy has proved resilient through the global downturn, demonstrating that the best response to economic turbulence is a long-term commitment to growth, innovation, and an expanding labour force.

Following the global financial crisis of 2008, our government joined in the national stimulus program and adopted a new five-year financial management strategy. The strategy was designed to provide a measure of economic support to communities during a period of recession, and preserve the gains made in public finances and capital investment over the previous decade. The goals of the stimulus package were achieved, and Manitoba's five-year budget strategy remains on track.

As new storm clouds gather in some of the world's leading economies, our government will work closely with Manitobans to monitor the implications for the provincial economy – and with the federal government to formulate appropriate policy responses. Our continuing goal is to sustain economic growth, find program efficiencies, meet our fiscal targets, and meet our commitments to Manitobans.

For all members of this Assembly, the decisions we make today will shape the future of this province. Our decisions must ensure that Manitoba continues moving forward and fulfils its great potential.

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.