



Speech from the **Throne**



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

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Delivered by:

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Lieutenant Governor of the
Province of Manitoba

Throne Speech 2013

Building for Jobs and Growth

I welcome you to the 3rd Session of the 40th Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

For many of the things we cherish today, we are indebted to the decisions made by previous generations of Manitobans.

The Floodway, controversial when it was built, has proved itself many times over, saving untold damage to homes, communities and our economy.

Hydro investments made decades ago continue to pay off by producing jobs and opportunities across the province, as well as low rates for families and businesses.

Homecare provides an invaluable service for families. The year 2014 marks the 40th anniversary of home care in Manitoba, the first and still the best such program in Canada.

These are touchstones for Manitobans. We might say they represent “The Manitoba Way.”

We look forward and we look after each other, guided by compassion and inclusivity. We know that we do better as a province when we work together.

We invest for the future. While we may greet extravagant plans with a healthy skepticism -- Manitobans are practical and value modesty -- we are willing to act boldly when presented with the opportunity to make investments that will pay off now and for the long term.

These are the values and priorities that have guided our government. We have put families first, protecting the jobs and services they count on in the face of threats. And we have worked with community leaders and other levels of government to make targeted investments. The Floodway expansion, the MTS Centre, and the rebuilding of every university and college campus are just a few examples of such partnerships.

This approach will continue to guide our plans for the year ahead. It has been a good year for Manitoba, with steady growth in our economy and our population. At the same time we know there is economic uncertainty around the world.

Our approach, in short, is to focus on what matters most. That means jobs, a stable economy, and key services that families depend on, such as health care and education.

By building and expanding roads and bridges -- without neglecting our schools and hospitals -- we are helping to keep people working now and in the years ahead, while preparing to seize the economic opportunities of the future.

Manitoba's economy is strong and stable in part because of its diversity. Our businesses and workers produce world-class goods, from farm machinery to busses to video games. But we must not forget that, ultimately, the most important thing a strong economy produces is jobs.

Training and jobs are two sides of the same coin. Targeted investments in infrastructure will create new job opportunities. And skills training will help more Manitobans take advantage of these opportunities.

By building critical infrastructure now, we are helping even more young people build their futures here in Manitoba.

The phrase "focused on what matters most" explains not just our goals, but how we plan to reach them as a government. Manitobans tell us to stick to the basics. And that is our plan. It is targeted. It is efficient. And it is affordable.

In the past two years we have found new ways to reduce unnecessary spending. We cut the number of Regional Health Authorities in half and at the same time we made drugs free for cancer patients. Resources that once supported bureaucracy now support front-line care.

We merged two Crown corporations, saving \$6 million in administrative costs to date.

We partnered with the private sector to develop a new model for delivering property registry services. This will provide \$75 million upfront, an annual revenue stream, and improved services to the public.

One year ago we committed to reducing the size of the civil service by 600 over three years. We can report today that we are on track to reach our target.

In the year ahead we will conduct a comprehensive review of our office space and related requirements to ensure we maximize the savings associated with reductions in the size of the civil service.

Savings found in the back offices allow us to continue to improve front-line services efficiently and affordably.

In Manitoba, a great quality of life is accessible to everyone. In the year ahead we will increase opportunities for people to enjoy everything Manitoba has to offer, from our cultural diversity to our many lakes and rivers.

And we will not allow Manitobans' health care to be threatened by reckless cuts. We will protect health care and take care of our seniors.

Building a Stronger Economy

Our focus is on more jobs and better jobs – the jobs our economy needs, the jobs families can build their futures around.

Parents want to know their children are receiving the education and training they need to allow them to take advantage of every opportunity in today's modern economy. Businesses have made it clear that more skilled workers are their top priority to allow them to expand and grow.

Building, repairing and expanding our infrastructure creates jobs, grows the economy, and makes Manitoba an even better place to live.

Earlier this year we made the difficult decision to raise the PST one cent on the dollar. The revenues were needed to meet the challenge of upgrading our infrastructure. These new revenues will allow us to take full advantage of matching dollars offered through the new federal infrastructure program

announced in last spring's federal budget, making sure we do not leave any federal dollars on the table.

Manitobans have made it clear they want us to keep building our province's infrastructure. And they want – and deserve – to know where investments are being made.

Our first infrastructure roundtable, held last week with municipal, business and labour leaders, reinforced the need to continue making long-term investments in infrastructure. Participants emphasized the importance of making strategic investments in infrastructure that will attract investment, increase trade, and create jobs and new opportunities for young people. A multi-year infrastructure plan will help industry mobilize resources, achieve efficiencies and improve productivity -- so we all get the most out of our "infrastructure buck."

Every dollar raised from the new point of PST will be fully dedicated to new investments in core infrastructure -- over and above existing spending levels. These strategic investments will help power our economy. They will be made up of:

- highways, bridges and strategic transportation infrastructure;
- flood protection; and
- municipal infrastructure, including roads, water and sewer.

Over five years, investments in these key areas are expected to reach a record \$5.5 billion.

In the months ahead, we will carry out additional infrastructure roundtables with leaders throughout our province to help develop a new five-year plan to create jobs and build our province's infrastructure. This plan will be delivered with the next provincial budget and will prepare us to secure matching federal dollars.

While the plan will be worked out over a number of months, we have already identified some key trade and transportation priorities to move ahead:

- A multi-year complete reconstruction of Highway 75 to interstate standards for floods. Too often spring flooding has cut off Manitoba families, businesses and the trucking industry from this vital route, which connects

Manitoba to the mid-continent trade and transportation corridor running through the US to Mexico. When our reconstruction is complete, this vital artery will be better protected for the people of Morris and the surrounding region, providing business with a more efficient and cost-effective transportation route.

- Major upgrades will be made to Highway 1 - another critical trade route - between Winnipeg and the Ontario border.
- Major investments to the Perimeter Highway system will consolidate the benefits offered by CentrePort, Manitoba's inland port. These will include phased reconstruction of the southwest Perimeter Highway, advancing design work on interchanges to improve traffic flow, and moving forward on a new bypass around Headingley to divert heavy truck traffic and enhance safety.
- Winnipeg's population is expected to reach one million within the next 20 years. It has never been more important to invest in efficient public transportation, the hallmark of any modern big city. We will go beyond our initial commitment for phase two of rapid transit to the University of Manitoba. We commit today to invest in a larger integrated project that will include adding an additional lane to the Pembina underpass, and improving active transportation and safety. Proceeding with all these elements at the same time will reduce traffic congestion and shorten disruption from construction.

Investments will also be made to improve roads and highways connecting communities in Manitoba.

- We will complete the re-paving of Highway 9 from Winnipeg up to Winnipeg Beach.
- Highway 10 will receive major investments south of Brandon to the US border, and north of Brandon to Minnedosa. Work will also begin on a multi-year improvement project between Bakers Narrows and Flin Flon.
- More than 100 km will be re-paved on Highway 6, and intersection improvements made near Ashern.
- Major resurfacing of Highway 59 from Brokenhead First Nation to beyond Grand Beach, will lead up to future plans to twin the highway.

- Additional work on PR 373 to Norway House and PR 374 to Cross Lake will be undertaken as part of a multi-year plan to completely surface these roads.

Southwest Manitoba, and especially the City of Brandon, is welcoming new residents and businesses at a record pace. This growth will be sustained by investment in new infrastructure. Our government will partner with the City of Brandon on a major investment in the redevelopment of the Daly Overpass to ease congestion and improve safety on 18th Street.

In response to two external reviews of the 2011 flood, our infrastructure plan will also see significantly increased investments for flood protection, including a permanent outlet for Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin. Work will also be undertaken on the Portage Diversion, Shellmouth Dam and the Assiniboine River dike enhancements. These flood protection improvements will be undertaken while we continue with the 2011 flood recovery and repairs at key water control structures like the Wawanesa Dam and Gardenton Floodway.

Such investments in core economic infrastructure will provide a solid foundation for steady growth and good jobs for years to come. They will not come at the expense of vital infrastructure that supports families, such as schools, hospitals and post-secondary campuses. In the 1990s Manitoba's infrastructure was starved for resources and took years to rebuild. To return to that shortsighted approach of reckless cuts and underinvestment would jeopardize our economy and move us backwards not forwards.

The building plan being announced today is one tool that will allow us to demonstrate to Manitobans how their infrastructure priorities are being addressed. Going forward, the Office of the Auditor General will prepare an annual public audit of infrastructure expenditures.

As we increase our investments in infrastructure, it is also critical that we make a renewed effort to protect the workers who are building our province. This session, we will be introducing new legislation to better protect roadside workers.

Skills for Success: Education and Training

Skilled trades are rewarding jobs, and they are in high demand in Manitoba.

Our government is dedicated to helping more Manitobans get jobs in the trades – both young Manitobans and adults who wish to upgrade their skills to get a better job. Last year we committed to the ambitious target of increasing our workforce by 75,000 by 2020. The Premier has taken formal responsibility for driving our government’s skills agenda.

This year’s Skills Summit, convened by the Premier’s Economic Advisory Council, set a vision that informs our strategy to support skills training.

Accordingly, in the year ahead we will:

- enhance and streamline tax credits for employers to hire more apprentices and grow their labour force;
- provide new tools to help match apprentices to job openings, helping more apprentices begin their careers and complete their training program; and
- introduce new legislation to ensure apprenticeship opportunities on all major government supported building projects.

In the coming year, we will designate a new trade - Powerline Technician - to help build our hydro infrastructure.

Delivering top-notch skills training requires excellent infrastructure at our post-secondary institutions.

A new state of the art Skilled Trades and Technology Centre at Red River College will accommodate close to 1,000 new students every year, offering training in high-demand trades such as carpentry and electrical, as well as heating, ventilation and air conditioning. A design tender has just been issued to launch this project.

Renewal at the University of Manitoba continues with the re-development of Tache Hall into a new visual and performing arts hub. Last week, the U of M selected a consortium of Winnipeg and Toronto firms to design and plan for the future development of the Fort Garry campus and the re-development of the former Southwood golf course into a vibrant mixed-use space. This year also marked the official opening of the Investors’ Group Field, a world-class facility for

professional, amateur and university sport. Work continues on a new Active Living Centre at the U of M, slated to open in 2015.

This year, the University of Winnipeg will move forward on a new rental housing development, providing more good-quality options for students and families in the heart of downtown. Work on the U of W's new field house and wellness centre is well underway. This new facility, which will be shared by the community, is expected to be completed by the end of 2014.

Close to \$100 million has been invested to renovate and expand University College of the North campuses in The Pas and Thompson, featuring additional classroom and laboratory space, as well as new libraries and childcare facilities. Regional UCN Centres have also been built in First Nation and other northern sites to reach more students at home.

This year, Red River College opened the Paterson Global Foods Institute in the Exchange District, home to its Culinary Arts and Hospitality programs and student residence.

L'Université de Saint-Boniface and Assiniboine Community College both expanded their workplace-based early childhood education (ECE) programs, helping to strengthen the Francophone and rural ECE workforces.

In the year ahead, Brandon University will offer a new Master of Environmental Sciences program, and our government will work closely with Assiniboine Community College and local industry to develop training plans for the rapidly growing energy sector in southwest Manitoba.

There should be no dead ends in education. A student who begins a college program in engineering technology, and later decides to pursue a university degree in engineering, should receive appropriate credit for her prior learning. All new programs introduced at post-secondary institutions will be required to demonstrate how they will save students time and money by recognizing relevant past education. We will focus our efforts on high-demand areas.

This year Manitoba Hydro began a unique partnership with BUILD and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs to train and employ First Nations people to install

home geothermal heating and cooling systems. More than 20 workers were trained installing 100 residential geothermal systems in Peguis and Fisher River First Nations, reducing energy costs in these homes by 70 per cent. In the coming year, this initiative will be expanded to four additional First Nations, employing some 50 more people in this growing green energy industry.

The entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well amongst Manitoba's Metis. Just last week the MMF hosted a successful trade show bringing together leaders in the Metis business community.

Northern Manitoba holds enormous economic potential. It is estimated that Hydro and mining development will drive the demand for thousands of skilled workers in northern Manitoba in the decade ahead. Providing northern Manitobans with skills training will ensure they are positioned to get these jobs, which in turn will drive the local economy. As part of our work on Opportunities North, we will bring together UCN, the Northern Sector Council and community leaders to focus on matching skills training with specific employment opportunities in the north.

In partnership with community and business, Manitoba has developed one of the most successful immigration models in the country, contributing to the rich diversity of our population, supporting new entrepreneurs and growing our skilled labour force. We are encouraged to be working with the Government of Canada on strategies to grow Manitoba's immigration through the successful Provincial Nominee Program and new federal expression of interest process.

A lack of basic literacy is a barrier to entering the job market or furthering one's education. Our government will take steps this year to ensure that Manitobans seeking literacy training will get the right training for their needs, supported by new credentials for adult literacy instructors.

Many high-demand jobs require workers to have a driver's licence. MPI has partnered with community groups in Winnipeg to help job seekers get their licence to increase their employment prospects. This outreach will be expanded, targeting newcomer populations and communities in the north, to help connect available workers to jobs.

Canada and Manitoba have a strong record of partnering to deliver effective labour market training. Growing Manitoba's labour force will require a flexible and customized approach that:

- allows for regular upgrading of skills;
- supports Manitobans who have not had a job to get a job; and
- recognizes the important investment of employers in on-the-job training.

We will work with other provinces and the federal government to renew labour market agreements that are tailored to Manitoba's needs and opportunities.

Growth and Jobs

As Manitoba's population and economy continue to grow, we are using more power than ever before. Past generations had the foresight to develop our Hydro resources, so today Manitoba enjoys a tremendous advantage: we generate our own electricity supply. It is clean, reliable and affordable. Our province is currently forecast to run out of power in approximately ten years if we do not increase production. Planning, review and construction of new dams and transmission lines can take more than a decade.

Now is the time to ensure the power is there when Manitobans need it in the future. This is a lesson from history. Consider that when the government of the day seized the opportunity to build the Limestone dam, it faced much opposition. But it knew investing in Manitoba's "clean oil" would pay off many times over. Building Limestone put people to work, and decades later, we still enjoy the great benefit of low power rates.

Manitoba Hydro has signed lucrative export contracts with US utilities to sell our surplus power, the profits from which will continue to keep Manitoba's rates among the lowest in North America.

Hydro construction is capital intensive. The first kilowatt produced by a hydro dam is the most expensive. But, as the Pointe du Bois station on the Winnipeg River, which began producing power in 1911 reminds us, power stations are built to run 100 years. That means 100 years of clean, renewable, affordable power. To back away from increased Hydro generation now would put us on the wrong side of history.

Manitoba Hydro's plan to build Keeyask and Conawapa, which would create an unprecedented \$16 billion in economic activity, will be thoroughly reviewed this year by two independent bodies to ensure that the plan is in the best long-term interest of the province compared to alternatives.

In his role as co-chair of the Canadian Energy Strategy, the Premier will continue to collaborate with other provinces toward a cleaner energy future. Manitoba will work with our western neighbours to strengthen east-west grid connections and clean energy sales.

Winnipeg-based New Flyer Industries is quickly becoming the world's foremost manufacturer of all-electric busses, with support from the provincial government and affordable hydro power. Our Electric Vehicle strategy will continue to advance future opportunities.

While the five year Canada-Manitoba Economic Partnership Agreement has come to a conclusion, we commit to maintaining our investment in economic engines like the Composites Innovations Centre, the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, and On Screen Manitoba.

We will continue to focus on the importance of innovation and commercialization of new ideas, products and business processes in making Manitoba competitive on the world stage. We will work with stakeholders to advance a new vision for a province-wide network that connects programs, services and partners to support the important work of Manitoba's inventors and entrepreneurs.

While the global economy continues to face a number of major challenges, the quickening pace of growth in major trading markets, including the US and Europe, will benefit Manitoba's competitive business centre. The new Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between Canada and the EU provides opportunities for Manitoba exporters to expand their reach into European markets. Our government will work with Winnipeg's new World Trade Centre and local exporters to grow and diversify our international trade and ensure Manitoba firms are able to take full advantage of our new infrastructure investments.

Low commodity prices have made equity markets challenging for mineral exploration. Renewed supports for mineral prospecting and exploration will

support junior mineral companies to continue their important activity in Manitoba, laying the foundation for an even stronger mining industry in the province. Last week a new Minister's Mining Advisory Council was announced, bringing together First Nations and industry to shape plans for skills training, new jobs and revenue sharing.

In the year ahead, we will also establish a Churchill transportation authority to lead co-operative efforts to diversify and market the port and coordinate land development and business investment.

Manitoba farmers have just brought in their harvest, which has been one of the most bountiful ever. Not only did farmers see strong results in traditional crops, such as canola and wheat, as well as forages, but also record growth in newer crops, including soybeans and grain corn.

However, American Country of Origin Labelling is threatening Manitoba's livestock industry. Our government has joined with the federal and other provincial governments in renewing calls to fix this harmful policy.

Building on the recent introduction of forage insurance, in the year ahead our government will introduce livestock price insurance to provide better protection for Manitoba's important beef and hog sectors.

The entrepreneurial and innovative culture of rural Manitoba drives new opportunities for growth. Our government will work with rural partners to advance rural development and foster an environment for business success.

We have launched a process to strengthen rural communities through amalgamation. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of local municipalities, we expect this initiative to produce more mergers in a single year than have ever taken place in Manitoba's history. This refocuses resources on local infrastructure and services that matter to rural families.

Today we are pleased to announce the first two mergers to be completed: the amalgamation of the RMs of Strathcona and Riverside into the new RM of Prairie Lakes; and the amalgamation of the RM of Sifton and the Town of Oak Lake.

In the lead up to the next Building Canada Fund, we are committed to working with municipalities on asset management plans to maximize the life of local infrastructure.

More and more young Manitobans are stepping into the world of business, using innovative ideas and advances in technology to create jobs. Building on new supports for rural apprenticeship graduates, we will invest in young entrepreneurs by:

- introducing a new grant program for business equipment to support youth launching innovative technology-based start-ups;
- partnering with the Canadian Youth Business Foundation to provide more young people in the skilled trades with entrepreneurship training and tools to start their own businesses; and
- exploring equity-based crowd sourcing as an opportunity to raise capital.

Manitoba boasts more than 2,000 companies working in the arts and culture sector, creating economic activity of more than \$1.5 billion a year. From film and video to music, dance and visual arts, to creating the latest video games and web apps, Manitoba is a hub of creative activity rapidly gaining an international reputation. Creative industries and the performing arts add to the vibrancy of our communities and are integral to revitalizing downtown Winnipeg.

Schools: The foundation of success

Parents know that having more one-on-one time with teachers in modern classrooms will give our kids the best start – and research confirms this. In the 1990s, investments in education were frozen or cut. This led to teacher layoffs and school overcrowding.

In contrast, we are investing in schools. We are working in partnership with our schools to reduce class sizes by directly investing in hiring more teachers and building and renovating more classrooms. In the first year of this work in partnership with school divisions over 80 new teachers were hired and there was a 20 per cent reduction in large classes. This year we are building on that success and over 100 new teachers have been hired.

New schools and major expansions are under construction and in development in Brandon, Thompson, Steinbach, Waverley West, Amber Trails, St. Boniface and Sage Creek. In the coming year, we will move ahead with plans to build a new school for a growing neighbourhood in northern Winnipeg, as well as a replacement school for Woodlands in the Interlake.

This year, we worked closely with teachers and schools to improve the math curriculum. Additional measures will be taken in the year ahead to strengthen math education for teachers.

This year, we will update the Language Arts curriculum for all K-12 students. The new curriculum will improve students' foundational literacy skills, along with the ability to think critically and communicate effectively.

A similar activity will be undertaken to renew the French as a first language curriculum designed for the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine as well as the curriculum developed for schools offering the French immersion program.

The early years school curriculum will soon be made available online, giving parents better information about what their children are learning at school and more opportunities to integrate school topics into home life.

Our government will take further steps as part of our comprehensive anti-bullying action plan to keep all children safe in schools. New reporting requirements, a new provincial disciplinary code of conduct and more prevention measures will be unveiled this year.

The so-called normal career path is changing. Young people graduating from high school this year are likely to have more careers than their parents would ever have thought possible. In today's rapidly changing economy, it is never too early to start planning for different career options.

Our government will work with teachers, schools and employers to provide more opportunities for students to integrate modern career planning into high school to help students realize how many options are available to them -- and plan how to get there. This will include:

- increasing dual credit options for students to earn post secondary credit while still in high school, helping to get a head start on higher learning;
- expanding co-op and work placement credit options for high school students so they can gain practical on-the-job experience for the future; and
- upgrading more high school shop classes so students can get a jump start on apprenticeship training for good careers in the trades.

Aboriginal people make up the youngest and fastest-growing population in Manitoba, and Aboriginal youth represent an increasingly important part of our labour force. There is strong consensus from all parts of our province that it is simply not acceptable that on-reserve schools are funded below the level of off-reserve schools.

Earlier this year, the Business Council of Manitoba assembled business, community, First Nation and Metis leaders to discuss the future of our province. All agreed on the essential importance of investing in Aboriginal education for the strength of our economy and the health of our community. The Premier's economic and education councils have made similar recommendations to equalize federal funding levels and develop more focused approaches to boosting Aboriginal graduation rates and learning outcomes.

We want to build on the successes seen in communities such as Fisher River Cree Nation, where strong leadership and a dedicated parent-run school board and local workforce have produced positive results: over 90 per cent attendance and graduation rates.

We will work with Aboriginal communities to implement similar strategies. We will broaden opportunities available to Aboriginal students, and invest in the educational tools that will help bridge the path between school and career, so that they can take full advantage of the growing demand for skilled workers. This will include:

- focused supports for literacy and numeracy education;
- new initiatives to strengthen Aboriginal education at RB Russell school in Winnipeg's inner city;

- strengthening partnerships between schools that service Aboriginal communities, such as the one between South East Collegiate and the Winnipeg Technical College;
- working with post-secondary education institutions to support teacher education programs to address the shortage of Aboriginal teachers; and
- building on new legislation to establish regional clusters of community schools involved in strengthening community participation in student success.

This year, our government will make a \$23 million investment to improve and expand the Frontier Collegiate Institute in Cranberry Portage. This important regional high school serves some 300 students from two dozen different northern communities. At the school's recently opened northern technical centre, students learn skills by building ready-to-move homes, helping to meet housing needs in the north. Our new investments will modernize the campus and add an expanded power mechanics training facility, training more students in this high-demand trade.

Investments in the health and early development of young children and babies are among the most important a society can make. Conclusive evidence from scientific and economic research reflects the lessons of traditional Aboriginal teachings in pointing to the life-changing value of investments in early childhood development: positive health outcomes, social development, and school readiness for the long-term well being and success of children. With strong support from the community and private sectors, our government will work with partners to establish a new early childhood development innovations fund to support ground-breaking, community-led innovations.

Healthy Families, Healthy Communities

We have steadily rebuilt the health care system after the devastation of the 1990s. The results in the lives of Manitobans are clear. Recent research from the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy shows that Manitobans are healthier and living longer. Fewer Manitobans are living with heart and respiratory diseases, or chronic conditions like osteoporosis. There are lower rates of heart attack and stroke in Manitoba, and the number of people being diagnosed with hypertension and diabetes has also declined. Manitoba scientists are conducting cutting-edge

research. At the University of Manitoba, researchers have identified the gene associated with ALS, giving hope to those with the disease and their families.

While some continue to advocate for the failed policies of reckless cuts and privatization, Manitoba families know that, even in uncertain times, our government will ensure the health care system is there for them when they need it.

Homecare helps tens of thousands of seniors remain in their own homes longer every year. Our government has made home care stronger, by phasing out user fees introduced in the 1990s, expanding access to thousands more seniors, and introducing new innovations like hospital home teams, which provide medical care to patients in their homes, reducing ER visits for them and their families.

There are five personal care homes currently under development, including in Lac du Bonnet, Morden and Winnipeg. In the coming months, final details will be announced for the two new 100-bed personal care homes to be built in Winnipeg.

Our government has committed to ensuring every Manitoban who wants a family doctor will have access to one by 2015. Building more community clinics is an important part of our plan to meet this commitment. Over the next year, several more clinics will open, including ACCESS Winnipeg West, the St. Vital QuickCare Clinic and a new mobile clinic serving communities in western Manitoba. Construction will also begin on new clinics in south Winnipeg and several rural sites.

Training and hiring more doctors, nurse practitioners and other providers is also vital to ensuring all Manitobans have access to a family doctor. We are providing funding to hire new health professionals in family doctor offices to help doctors take on more patients while offering their existing patients faster and more comprehensive care. This means more Manitobans who do not have a family doctor will be able to find one, and those who already have a family doctor will be able to get appointments sooner. We will also do more to help easily connect Manitobans to care providers.

Cancer touches all Manitoba families in some way. Our government continues to make world-class treatment and support for those facing this terrible disease a central priority. Manitoba has the best colorectal cancer screening levels and

radiation therapy wait times in the country. Our province is home to world renowned cancer experts and has some of the best survival rates in the world for lung cancer. Manitoba is truly a national leader in the fight against cancer.

In the year ahead we will launch enhanced cancer services in western Manitoba communities, open a new specialized Cancer QuickCare Clinic, and provide more after-hours support for Manitobans facing cancer and the illnesses and symptoms that can accompany their treatment. We will partner with the Canadian Cancer Society to enrich their patient transportation program and put in place more supports for patients to get to and from their appointments safely and conveniently.

The number of teenagers smoking today is down dramatically from 1999, but tobacco products continue to be marketed to youth and tobacco companies are taking advantage of loopholes in federal legislation on flavoured tobacco. We will continue to work with the federal government to deter youth from starting smoking.

Spending time at the hockey rink or soccer pitch is a major part of childhood in Manitoba, but sports-related concussions are a growing concern. In the coming months, we will announce a new approach to clinical management and research of concussions in young Manitobans to help parents know when it is safe for their children to return to play.

In the coming weeks, Manitoba will play host to a national conference on diabetes, and will release a new framework in support of overall renal health and avoided complications from diabetes and kidney disease.

High quality, accessible health care remains a top priority for Manitoba families. While some call for deep cuts to the public health system, or privatization plans that put the needs of those who are able to pay at the head of the line, our government has a plan to make health spending more efficient, while also protecting and improving universal health care.

In the 1990s, 13 regional health authorities with their own bureaucracies were created at a time when nurses were being laid off. We have gone in the opposite direction -- investing in front-line services while cutting bureaucracy. We cut the number of regional health authorities to five. There are now over 100 fewer

executive and board positions in the RHAs, and corporate spending by RHAs is down across the province. These savings are being redirected into supporting front line care. In the coming months our government will put in place a legislated cap on rural RHA corporate expenditures, building on the success of the cap already in place in Winnipeg.

We will continue to bend the cost curve for health care and protect the public system from the threats of those advocating for an American-style two-tier system.

Affordable, high-quality child care is vital to the lives of Manitoba families and the economic health of our province. Parents want to know that excellent accessible child care is available when it is time for them to go to work or school. Over the past decade we have transformed the child care system in Manitoba, newly funding more than 12,000 spaces, allowing more parents to work or improve their education who might otherwise have been unable to do so. In the weeks ahead tenders will be issued for the design and construction of new child care centres.

We have launched a series of consultations with parents and child care professionals to determine their priorities for child care. Input from these consultations will help inform future investments to further strengthen our community-based child care system.

We believe that all people deserve to have enough money to live with dignity and security, and are entitled to the opportunity to increase their standard of living through sustainable employment. Our government will always place a high priority on reducing poverty and creating opportunities for low-income Manitobans, putting in place incentives and supports that increase resources for those on social assistance while encouraging participation in the labour force and community. Building on recent RentAid benefit increases, we will continue to enhance access to portable benefits that support transitions into training and employment.

Increasing and maintaining the supply of social and affordable housing units is key to addressing the housing needs of low-income Manitobans. Stable housing is fundamental for healthy families, for success in education and training, and to securing and maintaining employment. We will build on our unprecedented investment in social and affordable housing through our new, three-year

commitment announced in Budget 2013 for 1,000 new social and affordable housing units.

In the coming weeks the historic Accessibility for Manitobans Act will be passed, helping to remove barriers for people with disabilities, with the goal of having a fully accessible province.

Manitobans deserve to feel safe in their neighbourhoods. Our efforts to fight crime by focusing on prevention, intervention and suppression are working. Authorities have seized more than \$5.7 million in assets from criminals. We will continue to work with police and local communities to help analyze crime patterns so that we are staying ahead of criminals and not chasing after them.

Working with community partners and the Winnipeg Police, we have recently launched a major new community development and crime reduction initiative, called Block by Block, in Winnipeg's William Whyte neighbourhood. This strategy will make a real community difference, helping families and reducing crime.

In the year ahead, new measures will also be introduced to strengthen laws related to witness protection and to deal with gang members. We will also partner with the RCMP to create a new police cadet program in Thompson.

A Good Life in a Great Place

One of the best things about Manitoba is that it is an affordable place to live, work and raise a family.

Manitobans pay the lowest rates in Canada for basic utilities -- electricity, home heating and auto insurance. In 2012 we guaranteed this in law, and it has been confirmed by an independent accounting firm. This year, the average Manitoban is saving over \$2,000 on hydro, home heating and car insurance compared to national average utility rates. At Saskatchewan's rates, the average Manitoban would spend over \$670 more on these utilities; at Ontario's rates, the average Manitoban would spend \$4,900 more every year.

More and more Manitoba parents are finding themselves caring for both their children and their aging parents. In Manitoba, child care costs and tuition for university and college remain among the lowest in the country, and home care is

free. These and other measures help keep life affordable for sandwich generation families.

We will work with Canada and other provinces to protect and strengthen the Canadian Pension Plan, in order to ensure that retirees today and in the future have the secure income they need for retirement.

Next year, Manitoba seniors will see further reductions to their school property bills.

Our government has a strong record of protecting consumers. We have been leaders on consumer protection such as on car repairs, home warranties, payday loans, gift cards, and cell phone contracts. And we will continue.

- Legislation will guarantee that the price you see, is the price you pay for new automobiles.
- A consultation is now underway to hear Manitobans' concerns about misleading and unfair cable, internet and phone promotions.
- New legislation will soon be introduced to address high-cost credit products that risk long-term ballooning debt for vulnerable people.

Buying or renovating a home are among the biggest purchases a family will ever make. Over the next year, our government will develop stronger consumer protection for home renovations and repairs to ensure families investing in their homes receive clear estimates up front, are treated fairly by contractors, and pay what they expect. New legislation will ensure that families buying or selling a home are also treated fairly.

We also continue to focus on making Manitoba more competitive for businesses to thrive and create jobs in our province by lowering the cost of doing business. Our government made Manitoba the first -- and still the only -- province to fully eliminate the small business tax. On January 1, the small business tax threshold will be expanded again, to extend these tax savings to even more small businesses -- savings these businesses will be able to turn into new jobs for Manitobans.

Last year our government introduced legislation to establish Manitoba Hydro's new Pay As You Save (PAYS) program, which covers the upfront cost of energy

efficiency retrofits using monthly utility savings. Manitoba Hydro will soon be expanding its Lower Income Energy Efficiency Program to include rental units, helping to improve aging housing stock without increasing rents.

Our government is tackling climate change by being the first jurisdiction in North America to ban the use of coal and petroleum coke for heating beginning January 1. Investments to support the transition to renewable energy sources, such as biomass, will continue, helping to create new jobs and industries in rural Manitoba.

All Manitobans value our province's great natural resources, from our lakes and rivers to forests, wildlife and parks. In the year ahead, new legislation will be introduced to reduce children's exposure to synthetic chemical pesticides. New actions will also be taken on priorities including:

- restoring and protecting the health of Lake Winnipeg, in co-operation with partners at home and outside our borders;
- protecting our boreal and our carbon-rich peat lands; and
- supporting conservation efforts on beluga whales and woodland caribou.

Our government will also begin consultations with First Nations, the Town of Churchill, local industry and tourism operators about the establishment of a polar bear provincial park to protect existing and newly found polar bear dens along the Hudson Bay Coast, and better promote the area as an international destination.

Our government has made significant investments in infrastructure to support the expansion of tourism in Manitoba. The tourism industry is experiencing strong growth of 5 per cent annually, and is expected to top \$2 billion within the next decade. And there's a lot happening in our province to be excited about: the opening of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights next year; an expanded Winnipeg Convention Centre; the Journey to Churchill development at Assiniboine Park; Winnipeg's bid for the Grey Cup; the FIFA Women's World Cup; the Canada Summer Games and the upcoming Junos. We also recognize the significant contribution of Manitoba's many world class festivals. Gimli's *Islendingadagurinn*, the Icelandic festival of Manitoba, our longest-running ethnic festival, celebrates its 125th anniversary in 2014.

Conclusion

During periods of economic uncertainty, governments face difficult choices. For our government, Manitoba families are always the main priority. We set our compass by their values, aspirations and interests.

In the year ahead we will continue to build an even better Manitoba, looking for practical solutions to the challenges our province faces. We will continue to take a balanced approach, focusing on skills training, jobs and economic opportunities for the future. This is our plan to help create thousands of good jobs, keep our unemployment rate among the lowest and ensure families can build a future here in our great province.

I trust that Divine Providence will guide your deliberations in the best interests of all our citizens.