

**Premier Heather Stefanson  
Swearing-In Speech (check against delivery)**

I stand before you today, as Manitoba's 24th Premier. This was something that was once unthinkable.

I reflect on the many people who paved the way to make this possible and I promise that our government will embrace their values of equality, inclusivity, and understanding.

I reflect on Edith Rogers – a proud Métis woman who became the first female elected to Manitoba's Legislative Assembly.

And I reflect on her daughter Margaret Konantz who became the first woman in Manitoba elected as a Member of Parliament.

I reflect on the legacy of my friend and mentor Bonnie Mitchelson – the first woman to lead Manitoba's Progressive Conservative Party and a distinguished Cabinet Minister who worked tirelessly to attract and retain new immigrants to our province.

But most of all, I think of my mother and my grandmother who made me into who I am today. As the first woman elected to serve as the Premier of Manitoba, I am proud to stand on their shoulders.

And I while I may be the first woman to hold this office, I take this oath confident in the knowledge that I will not be the last.

While the past can be an inspiration, it can also create and re-open wounds.

The discovery of unmarked graves on the sites of former residential schools has shaken our province to its core, prompting a necessary reflection on the sins of the past and a renewed commitment to reconciliation.

Our government is committed to listening and learning from First Nations leaders, Elders, and Indigenous families as we advance reconciliation together.

During my time in cabinet, I had the honour of working with the Clan Mothers Elders Mae Louise Campbell and Jamie Goulet to advance their vision of healing for Indigenous women and girls.

Their Clan Mothers Healing Village is a model of reconciliation in action – a place where Indigenous women and girls can recover from exploitation and violence, and forge a new life rooted in their Indigenous culture and identity.

The voices of these Indigenous Elders and families are the voices of the future of reconciliation in our province.

I look forward to learning from Indigenous Manitobans and working together to heal the wounds of the past and forge a new path forward.

We must also heal from the COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected the lives and livelihoods of every Manitoban.

Our communities have been fragmented without the ability to gather together, and our families have lost too many of their loved ones.

This terrible virus has overwhelmed our health care system and harmed our economy. Thankfully, Manitobans have done what they always do – they have stepped up to help their fellow citizens.

As of today, over 86 per cent of eligible Manitobans have rolled up their sleeves and gotten the vaccine, saving lives and protecting our health care system.

To Manitobans who have chosen to get vaccinated, I want to say THANK YOU.

Because of you, we have been able to lift many public health restrictions – allowing our business owners to re-open their restaurants, movie theatres, and retail stores to thousands of customers.

Because of you, our children are back to school for in person learning and our loved ones in long-term care are able to once again see their families.

Because of you, we have been able to work with faith leaders so they can safely welcome Manitobans back to their houses of worship.

And because of you, we have been able to join True North Sports and Entertainment and the Winnipeg Football Club to welcome thousands of fans back to cheer on our Winnipeg Jets and our Grey Cup Champion Winnipeg Blue Bombers.

But while we are finally seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, the COVID-19 pandemic has created and exposed new challenges in our health care system and our economy.

The redirecting of health care resources to respond to COVID-19 created significant surgical and diagnostic backlogs that are hurting the health of our seniors and vulnerable Manitobans.

The significant challenge we faced in our personal care homes exposed flaws in our long-term care system, showing that our seniors are not always receiving the respectful and dignified care that they deserve.

And our overwhelmed Intensive Care Units demonstrated that we need a system that can better adapt to a public health crisis.

Our government will take immediate action to address these challenges.

In the coming weeks, we will establish a Task Force to clear the surgical and diagnostic backlogs and enhance our ICU capacity.

And we will do right by our seniors by implementing every recommendation of Dr. Lynn Stevenson's review of long-term care in our province.

COVID-19 has also done untold damage to Manitoba's economy.

Many small businesses have closed and our hospitality sector is facing unprecedented challenges.

Manitoba employers are finding it difficult to attract and retain workers, creating critical labour shortages that are dragging down Manitoba's productivity.

We need to listen to our business leaders, small business owners, and our young, Indigenous, and new Canadian entrepreneurs about what they need to start and grow their businesses.

To the extent that government is impeding their productivity and growth, we need to get out of their way and let them run their businesses.

Over the coming months and years, that is exactly what our government will do.

We will listen to our business community and create the conditions for economic growth.

And we will reduce unnecessary barriers to success for our small and medium sized businesses, allowing them to continue to employ thousands of Manitobans.

I grew up in a family dedicated to public service.

My mother was a citizenship judge who administered the oath of citizenship to countless new immigrant families.

My father was an accomplished businessperson who twice ran to represent the people of Fort Rouge in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly.

I spent many afternoons and evenings participating in these rituals - the oath of citizenship and the speech at the door.

Both require humility and a commitment to a cause greater than yourself.

I have spent a lifetime knocking on doors because I believe in everything that this country and this province stands for.

For peace, prosperity, and human rights for all.

I promise that I will always be humble in the pursuit of that cause.

I promise that I will always listen to you – the people of Manitoba.

And I promise that in two years, when this government seeks a renewed mandate, you will see yourself in our priorities and our vision.

I will work every day to gain and maintain your trust.

That is my mission, and together we will accomplish great things for our great province.

Thank you.