



Speech from the **Throne**



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

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Delivered by:

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Lieutenant Governor of the
Province of Manitoba

Throne Speech 2014

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Manitoba Legislature:

Welcome to this Fourth session of the 40th Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The annual Speech from the Throne is an opportunity for government to define its priorities for the year ahead.

Our government has rooted our priorities in those of everyday Manitobans.

As the new century began, we reversed the policies of the previous decade. We ended a decade of cuts and underfunding, and launched a new era of investment and growth.

We opened the doors to new operating rooms and clinics, more classrooms and colleges, and more community clubs and child care centres.

Our province is stronger today because of the things we have built together.

In the last decade we have grown our economy at an annual rate of 2.5%, the third best in the country.

We have added over 140,000 people to our population and will hit a record 1.3 million people calling Manitoba their home in the next year.

We have built the best immigration system in Canada, helping businesses to expand and adding to the rich diversity of our communities.

We have more Manitobans working than ever before, with an unemployment rate that is amongst the lowest in Canada.

And we have kept Manitoba one of the most affordable places to live in the country.

Through economic downturns and a series of major floods, we have kept moving forward by focusing on those things that matter most to Manitoba families.

Economic forecasters are once again predicting that Manitoba's growth will be among the best in Canada for 2015.

With an eye to the priorities of all Manitobans, today we keep building. Our plan will build an even brighter future for Manitobans by expanding and improving on the things that are working.

In the year ahead we will create new opportunities for young people to explore their interests and get the training and education they need to build good lives here in Manitoba.

In the year ahead, we will continue to build our core infrastructure, better connect communities and ensure more Manitobans can benefit with good jobs and training.

In the year ahead, we will protect and improve the services that families count on most, from child care to care for our seniors.

Our plan is balanced and focused, building on our successes, and making life better for all Manitobans.

Education for the New Economy

Investment in education has been a cornerstone of our growth strategy for the past decade and a half. It is the most important investment we can make to ensure that our province continues to grow and prosper.

Every parent wants their child to have the same opportunities that they had and more – the chance to have a rewarding career, own a home, start a family and build a good life here in Manitoba.

In today's economy, advanced education and training is the most reliable path to a good job. Two out of every three jobs that will be created in the next decade will require college, university or apprenticeship training.

Over the past 15 years our government has rebuilt and expanded the post-secondary system, making advanced education accessible and affordable for more Manitobans.

Our campuses have been transformed with 80 major capital projects supported by \$1.1 billion in provincial investments. The options available to students have been increased with the addition of almost 300 new programs.

As a direct result, enrollment has dramatically increased. College enrollment is up by 52% since 1999, university enrollment has increased 42% and apprenticeship training has more than tripled.

Over the coming months, our government will bring together education leaders to develop a new post-secondary education strategy to be released in the spring.

The new strategy will be one of *targeted growth*, responsive to the needs of students and the economy, and supporting the collective needs of a growing, dynamic province.

One goal of our strategy will be to create new opportunities for learning that link to the emerging needs of the workforce. Our government will:

- fund the development of five new hybrid university/college programs, which combine academic learning with technical skills for in-demand fields such as engineering, water stewardship and new media;
- expand our existing apprenticeship model, which combines classroom instruction and on-the-job experience, to certify new occupations outside the traditional trades, such as Information Technology; and
- form a new Trades and Technology Network to facilitate greater collaboration between Manitoba's four colleges and improve responsiveness to employers' needs.

A second goal will be to add pathways for students and ensure that when it comes to higher learning, there are no "wrong doors" and no "dead ends". Our government will:

- launch a new Credit Transfer Portal to help students move more easily between programs and institutions;

- create a Student Advocate position to help ensure that course credits and work experience are recognized in a consistent and transparent way; and
- double the number of online courses available through eCampus Manitoba from 500 to 1,000.

A third goal of our new strategy is to build on the significant steps taken over the last fifteen years to ensure post-secondary education is accessible and affordable. As part of an ongoing effort to preserve affordability and increase the participation of under-represented groups, our government will:

- make Manitoba the first province in western Canada to offer interest-free student loans;
- reduce the barrier to student aid faced by many rural and northern students by removing vehicle ownership as a consideration; and
- lay the groundwork for a new educational training facility in the north Interlake, starting with a steering committee that will include First Nations and surrounding communities.

Planning for higher learning must begin in high school.

High school should be seen as a launch pad, not a finish line – a place where students can get a head start, explore careers without being locked in, and graduate with a sense of direction and purpose.

To help young people better prepare for rewarding careers, our government will work to ensure that all Manitoba students have the opportunity to access post-secondary courses and paid work experiences while still in high school. We will work with schools to:

- launch a new ‘First-Year Now’ initiative, modeled after the successful program in Seven Oaks School Division, giving students the opportunity to take university and college courses in high school and earn dual-credits;

- offer new specialized high school programs where students have access to industry experts and state-of-the-art equipment - as Sisler High School has done with its cyber-security academy;
- expand the existing High School Apprenticeship Program by accrediting new programs in schools across all regions of the province;
- work with the Alliance of Manitoba Sector Councils to introduce a new Manitoba Career Prospects program, bringing more employers into classrooms and more students into workplaces; and
- support the division scolaire franco-manitobaine's efforts to expand career development and training opportunities for students in French.

Studies confirm what community experience has long demonstrated – that investments in early childhood education are critical to improving children's success in school and beyond.

In the coming weeks a new early childhood development strategy will be released, renewing our focus on preparing Manitoba children to enter the classroom.

Innovative new programs like Reading Apprenticeship and the PAX Good Behaviour Game are helping young children develop the skills they need to succeed in school.

This past year over 100 new teachers have been hired to help reduce class sizes in the critical early years and to give students more one-on-one attention. New legislation will be introduced this session to ensure class sizes continue to decrease.

Efforts continue to ensure students complete high school. Manitoba's high school graduation rate has increased to 85% today from 71% just over a decade ago. That means 2,000 more students are successfully completing high school every year.

More work is needed to continue this improvement, including on reserves.

This fall, the Premier began bringing together employers and post-secondary leaders to meet with First Nations students in their own communities. Together they are exploring ways to overcome barriers and build bridges to higher learning and good jobs.

The educational success of Aboriginal youth is essential for Manitoba's continued prosperity and remains a top priority for our government.

Our government will continue to build on the success of our Provincial Nominee Program to recruit newcomers who want to work and make Manitoba their home. In the year ahead, we will host consultations with newcomer groups to strengthen community engagement and open paths to good jobs.

Literacy and adult learning programs are important stepping stones for many new Canadians and others seeking to upgrade their skills. We will continue to strengthen programming throughout our network of Adult Literacy providers to serve more Manitobans. We will also work with community partners to pilot a new wrap-around literacy model, incorporating essential skills training, child care, high school and post-secondary credits, and work placements.

Manitoba has launched a new sustainable employment strategy that supports Manitobans on social assistance to get the training they need to go back to work or get their first job. This strategy is a major component of our commitment to reduce poverty and grow our workforce.

This summer Rent Assist was introduced to increase benefits for both social assistance recipients and low-income workers. The new benefit is portable, making it easier to move from welfare to work. This year we will continue to make progress on our commitment to increase benefits to 75% of median market rents over four years.

The Premier's Council on Education, Poverty and Citizenship will work together with the Economic Advisory Council to leverage major infrastructure projects into opportunities to train Manitobans facing barriers to employment.

Having access to quality and affordable child care is essential for parents returning to work, pursuing higher education, or looking for their first job.

Working together with parents, communities and child care workers, Manitoba has built one of the best early learning and child care systems in Canada – with over 14,000 newly funded spaces, over 100 new and expanded child care centres, and the lowest fees in Canada outside Quebec.

In Manitoba our vision is to work with partners on a long-term plan to expand the number of spaces so that child care is universally accessible for all families who need it, while maintaining affordability.

A new Child Care Commission will help chart the course forward. This will include looking at ways to forge stronger partnerships between child care centres and public schools, as well as exploring new approaches for providing part time and casual child care.

New measures will also protect child care spaces in schools, and advance our work with Aboriginal child care providers to enrich programming related to Aboriginal culture and language.

Creating Jobs and Building a Stronger Economy

Sustaining Manitoba's strong economic momentum not only requires a growing workforce, but also strategic investments in infrastructure and the incubation of new industries.

Manitobans from all walks of life have called for greater investment in the core infrastructure that helps revitalize communities, increases trade and investment, and strengthens Manitoba's competitive position.

That is why we are matching every dollar raised from the new point of PST with new investments in core infrastructure, over and above previous investment levels, and providing detailed annual reports to show exactly where the money is being spent.

Our five-year \$5.5 billion plan to build and renew our highways and bridges, flood protection and municipal infrastructure is on track to boost our economy by \$6.3 billion and create almost 60,000 jobs.

This year, investments in our highway network will hit a record \$700 million, including work on 2,300 kilometers of highways – roughly the distance from Winnipeg to Toronto. Our infrastructure plan will see \$3.7 billion invested in highways over five years, double what was spent on highways in the entire decade of the 1990s.

Improvements will be made to key trade and transportation corridors, including a new interchange at Highway 59 and the north Perimeter, and major upgrades to the Trans-Canada Highway east of Winnipeg and the south Perimeter highway. At a public meeting tonight, we will share our solution to better protect Highway 75 against repeated flooding, including the construction of a new, higher bridge at Morris. This plan will address the weakest link in our primary trade corridor to the United States, which carries \$19 billion in trade every year.

In the coming year, investments will also be made to better connect families and businesses with communities across the province, including:

- finishing major upgrades to Highway 6 from Woodlands to north of Grosse Isle;
- improvements to Highway 10 near Boissevain, south of Minnedosa, east of Swan River and south of Flin Flon;
- repaving Highway 17 north of Fisher Branch; and
- surfacing Provincial Road 327 to Easterville.

Since 2007 over \$240 million has been invested in Highway 1 west of Winnipeg. These investments twinned and rebuilt the Trans-Canada Highway, added paved shoulders and rumble strips, and greatly improved the quality of ride and safety of the roadway. As a result, the speed limit will be raised to 110 kilometers an hour from the Saskatchewan border to Winnipeg.

As we renew our highway network, safety remains a key priority. This year the province will invite municipalities, police services, First Nations, and advocacy groups like the Canadian Automobile Association, to form a new Road Safety Committee to ensure that safety principles are integrated into all aspects of transportation policy.

In addition, a new Infrastructure Innovations Council has been formed in partnership with the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association to apply innovative approaches to core infrastructure design, construction and maintenance, and to boost productivity and maximize return on investment.

A series of devastating floods over the last decade – the impacts of which continue to be felt by communities and producers across the province - have made the construction of new flood protection an urgent priority.

The 2011 Flood Review Task Force recommended making the Lake St. Martin Emergency Channel permanent and building a new outlet on Lake Manitoba to provide better flood protection.

Work on this complex, integrated project is well underway – including Aboriginal and public consultations and detailed studies on soil composition, water flow and topography.

The new Lake Manitoba outlet will be built through difficult and remote terrain, and will run almost as long as the Red River Floodway. Today we are pleased to announce that from the two options presented at a recent Open House in Arborg, our government is listening to public advice and will build the outlet to the higher capacity of 7500 cfs – a flow equivalent to five Olympic-sized swimming pools every minute.

Investments will continue to be made in flood protection along the Assiniboine River and in new community dike projects.

Protecting Manitoba from floodwaters also requires better management of surface water. New legislation will be introduced to protect Lake Winnipeg, preserve wetlands, strengthen surface water management and drainage

regulation, and support the new Assiniboine River Basin Initiative to improve trans-boundary water planning.

Renewing municipal infrastructure is another key part of our plan. This past year provincial funding was provided to support the renewal of over 400 kilometers of municipal roads and 13 bridges outside of Winnipeg. In the coming year, Manitoba's municipal road budget will be increased and funding for municipal bridges will be doubled.

Upgrades will also be made to 27 wastewater treatment facilities throughout the Lake Winnipeg basin to protect Manitoba's lakes, streams and rivers, and support future growth.

A new streamlined portal for infrastructure program information and applications, to be developed with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, will make it easier for municipalities to access and take advantage of provincial infrastructure funding.

New legislation will ensure bilingual services are protected in newly amalgamated municipalities.

In Brandon all levels of government are supporting a major renewal of the Brandon regional airport to expand air service in southwest Manitoba. Our government is also undertaking a major reconstruction of the First Street Bridge, and will work with Assiniboine Community College on further redevelopment of the North Hill Campus. Manitoba will also partner with the City of Brandon to complete needed roof repairs to the Keystone Centre.

We will continue to work closely with key stakeholders to develop our Arctic gateway, while making investments that position Churchill as a hub for Arctic research and tourism, including exploring expanded marketing and development opportunities for the Churchill Town Centre.

We have been pleased to work with federal and municipal partners to build new water and wastewater capacity for the RM of Rosser, CentrePort and surrounding communities. In the coming days, new legislation will be introduced

to establish a special planning area to support rapid expansion, trade and strategic growth at CentrePort, including development of the new CentrePort Canada Rail Park.

Manitoba will continue to promote trade within Canada and internationally, including leveraging our World Trade Centre, and developing new opportunities presented by the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between Canada and the European Union.

In Winnipeg, provincial investments in roads and infrastructure have reached historic levels, and we look forward to participating in the Mayor's new Build Winnipeg Partnership to develop a long-term vision for priority investments, including better streets, rapid transit and an even more vibrant downtown.

To ensure that opportunities from growth are extended to all Winnipeggers, we will work with other levels of government and community partners such as the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development and Urban Circle Training Centre to expand career planning and skills training for Aboriginal people.

We will also work with the new Mayor and Council on updating the City of Winnipeg Charter to strengthen transparency and accountability.

Small businesses drive job creation and economic growth in communities right across our province, which is why we were the first – and still only – province to eliminate small business taxes.

Our new one-stop-shop for business services, Entrepreneurship Manitoba, is making it easier and faster to start a new business.

Moving forward, our government will work with the Manitoba Employers Council to reduce red tape and develop and implement best practices related to regulations, including new public reporting on regulatory impacts.

Young entrepreneurs are building the next generation of high-tech businesses in Manitoba. The exchange district's Innovation Alley is becoming a focal point for students, entrepreneurs and investors to advance their ideas from the drawing board to the board room.

New legislation will help support business and job continuity with tools for succession planning and employee ownership options for retiring business owners.

Canada and Manitoba are investing a total of \$176 million through the Growing Forward 2 partnership, supporting innovative strategies to boost competitiveness in our agricultural sector, including more value-added processing and the establishment of a globally recognized grain innovation hub.

Manitoba producers have experienced unprecedented wet weather and poor growing conditions. Canada and Manitoba are providing Agri-Recovery to support affected producers. In addition, our government will establish a new working group with industry to ensure risk management tools are responsive to changing climate.

New measures will support rural development by promoting Manitoba farms and food, and will help food producers and processors to start and grow their businesses.

Manitoba is welcoming more visitors every year with attractions like the new Canadian Museum for Human Rights and the Journey to Churchill exhibit at the Assiniboine Park Zoo.

New world class venues, like the MTS Centre and Investors Group Field, give Manitobans the opportunity to see the stars of today and tomorrow. Our government will also continue to make investments in amateur sport and recreation throughout the province.

Next year more than 200,000 people will enjoy marquee sporting events right here in Manitoba - including the Grey Cup, the FIFA Women's World Cup, the Telus Cup regional qualifier in Dauphin and the RBC Cup in Portage la Prairie. These events will boost our economy by \$100 million.

Today we are pleased to declare that 2015 will be celebrated as the Year of Sport in Manitoba.

Building on the recent introduction of popular Growler Bars, a new craft beer strategy will further develop Manitoba's home-grown brewing industry, creating jobs and opportunities from agriculture to processing to hospitality.

New legislation – the strongest in Canada – will target invasive species such as zebra mussels, helping protect Manitoba's \$30 million commercial fishing industry as well as boaters and families visiting our beaches.

A new potash marketing strategy will soon be launched to solicit interest in potash mining in western Manitoba.

This year, two major mining operations opened near Snow Lake, with total investments of almost half a billion dollars, creating over 370 permanent jobs in northern Manitoba. In the year ahead, we will work with the Mining Advisory Council to put in place a framework to share mining tax revenue with Aboriginal communities and increase jobs, training and business opportunities.

Wuskwatim marked a turning point in our province's hydro history, beginning a new chapter of northern development. Partnering with Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation provided First Nation input into construction design, training and jobs, and an equity stake in development.

After two comprehensive public reviews, Keeyask has now been licensed to be built as a partnership between Manitoba Hydro and four local First Nations, creating even greater scope for Aboriginal employment and training opportunities, while ensuring Manitobans will continue to have a reliable supply of power into the future.

Building Keeyask and Bipole III will create more than 10,000 person years of employment. Power from Keeyask will also allow Manitoba Hydro to close its last remaining coal-fired plant, an important step in Manitoba's fight against climate change.

As these new projects proceed, we must not forget the effects of past development. Our government is committed to a new era of reconciliation with

First Nations impacted by hydro development, to address the damage done in the past and build stronger relationships into the future.

We are proud to be renewing an historic resource management agreement with Opaskwayak Cree Nation to ensure sustainable management of natural resources within their traditional territory.

Our government will work with Aboriginal communities, northerners and industry to advance land use planning, boreal protection and sustainable economic development as part of our Opportunities North initiative.

We will also expand financial incentives for manufacturers to increase the use of renewable biomass energy.

Manitoba families have become the top recyclers in all of Canada.

In the community of Elie, the environmental liability left over from the former Isobord plant has now been cleaned up and the site will soon be home to a state-of-the-art electronic waste recycling facility.

A new Recycling Strategy will be launched this year with a goal of reducing by 50% the amount of waste sent to landfills by 2020. New initiatives will expand curbside composting and increase recycling of commercial and industrial waste.

This strategy will create hundreds of new green jobs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Investing in Prevention and Protecting Front-Line Services

Manitobans, like all Canadians, are proud of universal public health care. We will continue to fight threats to this service that defines us as Canadians - including calls for American-style two-tier health care and cuts to front-line services.

Our approach means hiring doctors and nurses rather than firing them.

It means building hospitals and personal care homes, not freezing health capital and cancelling construction projects.

It means putting the needs of patients first rather than cutting and privatizing the services families depend on.

Family doctors and primary care are the backbone of our public health system, keeping families healthy with quality care from someone they know, while also making the health care system more efficient.

Our new Family Doctor Finder has already connected over 20,000 Manitobans with a family doctor since it was launched last year; and our QuickCare clinics have now had over 100,000 patient visits.

These initiatives and others are helping connect Manitobans with the primary care they need. In the coming year our government will:

- open new QuickCare Clinics staffed by nurse practitioners in northwest Winnipeg, St. Vital and Southdale and finalize the location of a new QuickCare Clinic in west Winnipeg;
- announce the location of a new ACCESS centre in St. Vital, as construction moves ahead on new centres in St. Boniface and Fort Garry;
- start construction on new primary care clinics in Ste Rose and Grand Rapids, open a new clinic in Swan River and add a new mobile clinic in the north Interlake; and
- hire dozens of primary care professionals including nurse practitioners into new MyHealth teams in every region of the province.

These measures will help families get the right care they need in a timely way, avoiding stressful and unnecessary trips to an emergency room. But we know there will always be a need for better and faster emergency care. This year we will:

- continue recruiting more nurses and other health professionals to our ERs;
- launch a new program at Red River College to train advanced care paramedics to start emergency medical interventions before patients arrive at the ER;

- make the pilot Emergency Paramedic in the Community program permanent, as it has helped hundreds of patients avoid unnecessary ER trips;
- finalize designs to rebuild and expand ERs in Flin Flon and Dauphin; and
- begin construction on the redevelopment of Grace Hospital, which will include a new ER.

In the coming weeks we will award the tender for the new 10-bed health centre in Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes.

We are committed to giving seniors the care they need and the options they want outside of a hospital setting. More than 300 personal care home beds are currently under development across Manitoba, including in Morden/Winkler, Lac du Bonnet and Winnipeg. We will continue to build more PCH beds and to provide culturally appropriate care for seniors and special supports for those suffering with dementia.

We are also committed to strengthening Manitoba's best-in-Canada home care system and we will introduce Manitoba's first rural Hospital Home Team.

Every year more and more Manitobans are surviving their battle with cancer - a testament to their determination and Manitoba's world-class doctors. This year we will:

- establish a new cancer hub for Winnipeg to help patients get better coordinated care and faster diagnostics and treatment;
- expand the hours at our Urgent Cancer Care Clinic, which has already helped hundreds of patients;
- increase funding so that more patients can participate in clinical trials; and
- take steps to prevent cancer by prohibiting minors from using tanning beds.

All Manitobans can be proud of the role of Manitoba scientists in developing treatment being used in the global fight against Ebola. The province will continue to advance ebola preparedness with public health officials, regional health authorities and health care providers.

Manitoba has been a pioneer in providing compassionate, comprehensive end-of-life care. We are pleased to be partnering with Doctor Harvey Chochinov and a broad community coalition to lay the foundation for a new International Centre for Dignity and Palliative Care.

Healthy and safe workplaces are a critical health priority and an essential right of all workers.

In the coming year, our government will strengthen enforcement of workplace safety laws and bring forward new legislation for firefighters, paramedics and others suffering from PTSD. The Workers Compensation Board will also complete a stakeholder review of its rate model and begin the work of building a new model that encourages injury and illness prevention, strengthens accountability and removes financial incentives for suppressing claims.

Investments in healthy living and prevention help people live longer and more fulfilling lives while reducing the need for costly interventions.

This year we will launch a new round of Sports Opportunity grants for communities across the province to help Manitobans stay active and healthy.

Our government is making milk, fruits and vegetables more affordable for families living in remote areas, and supporting communities like Garden Hill to develop food social enterprises.

This year our government will also continue a major focus on crime prevention, providing young people with opportunities to stay active and engaged.

Working with community partners like the Winnipeg Jets True North Foundation, Manitoba's new After School Leaders program has already offered more than 300 high school students exciting opportunities to experience fields like culinary

arts, cinematography and musical theatre. This year the program will be expanded to Brandon.

In Winnipeg, redevelopment of the old Merchants Hotel and partnerships like the Block by Block community safety project have helped reduce violent crime by close to 30%.

The horrific murder of Tina Fontaine this summer and the recent vicious assault of Rinnelle Harper have focused national attention on the need to take action to prevent violence against Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. Manitoba stands in solidarity with the families of victims and the many other voices across the country in calling for a national inquiry. Manitoba will continue to support families with initiatives like the annual Wiping Away the Tears gathering and we will work proactively to support the development of a strong national response.

We are also working with First Nations to address the proposed elimination of the federal government's band constable program, to ensure affected communities have access to community policing.

The safety of children is paramount in our child welfare system.

We have supported better training and helped hire almost 500 additional social workers since *Changes for Children* in 2006. This spring, the *Social Work Profession Act* will be proclaimed to establish the highest professional standards for those entrusted to care for vulnerable families.

Next, we will work with the University of Manitoba on a proposal for a Masters of Social Work in Indigenous Knowledge, as recommended by the Premier's Advisory Council on Education, Poverty and Citizenship.

We agree with the conclusions of Commissioner Hughes that more work is needed to strengthen early prevention efforts, address the root causes of poverty and build stronger families. A new funding model will ensure services are provided to families as early as possible to prevent family breakdown and children coming into care.

Manitoba's Minister of Family Services is also co-chairing a national committee of provincial Ministers reviewing ways to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in care.

This year new targeted supports will be put in place to assist the most vulnerable children. This will include replacing contract employees with better trained staff for emergency placement shelters, creating a new unit for young women with complex needs and more clinical assessments.

New legislation will strengthen public reporting by Manitoba's Children's Advocate to increase transparency and help those working in the system prevent future tragedies.

Non-profit organizations play a vital role in our communities, providing essential services to families in need. This year, our nationally recognized project to reduce red tape for non-profit organizations will be expanded to allow these groups to spend less time on paper work and more time delivering services.

Building safe and affordable housing helps build stronger communities and reduce poverty. Our government is moving forward with plans to build 1,000 more social and affordable housing units. A partnership has been launched between our government and the Manitoba Metis Federation to build affordable homes for Metis families across the province. We will also continue efforts with community organizations and the City of Winnipeg to improve and stabilize the supply of rooming houses as an option for those in greatest need.

Taking a Balanced Approach

A balanced approach means making smart investments today that reduce costs tomorrow. It also means finding more efficient ways of delivering quality public services.

All governments in Canada are under fiscal pressure. In Manitoba our plan is to responsibly return to balance without major cuts to the programs Manitoba families rely on.

Our government is on track to meet our goal of reducing the size of the civil service by 600 through retirements and attrition, with 485 positions now off the payroll. This initiative, combined with a voluntary reduced workweek, is helping to save over \$30 million this year alone.

In the year ahead we will undertake a major restructuring of internal services such as accommodations, procurement, IT and materials and equipment management. These services will be consolidated under the direct authority of Treasury Board to reduce costs.

We are also setting a goal for the next year of reducing the office space used by government by over 100,000 square feet.

Basic household costs in Manitoba – including home heating, hydro and auto insurance - are the lowest in Canada, over \$2,100 less per family than the national average.

The average Manitoba family pays \$3,800 less in taxes today because of tax relief provided by our government since 1999.

Our minimum wage is second highest among provinces and we will continue to improve purchasing power for low-income workers.

Our inflation rate this year has been the fourth lowest in Canada.

In the coming year, new consumer protection legislation will be introduced to help Manitobans get a fair deal, including:

- ensuring homeowners are provided complete, upfront, guaranteed quotes and timelines for home improvements;
- providing pet owners with upfront and all-in pricing for veterinarian services; and
- helping homebuyers and realtors more easily identify properties that were previously used as criminal grow-ops or drug production sites.

With winter now upon us, over 10,000 Manitobans are already accessing low-interest loans from MPI, making it easier to buy snow tires.

Building on Manitoba Hydro's successful PowerSmart program, this year a new independent energy efficiency agency will be put in place to expand opportunities for all Manitobans to lower their energy bills.

Conclusion

As we look ahead, we also take time to honour the past.

This year we join all Manitobans in commemorating the First World War centenary.

We mark the sacrifices made by the many Manitobans, including First Nations and Metis volunteers, who went to war a century ago in the service of our country.

As we gather today in this Assembly, representing all Manitobans, we renew our promise that those sacrifices will never be forgotten.

We are all indebted to our veterans and military personnel for the sacrifices they have made and continue to make, representing us around the world and helping here at home.

It is due to these sacrifices that Manitobans today look to the future with a sense of optimism. I would like to thank our guests for joining us for the start of the new session, and thank our Speaker and all Members of the Legislature for the hard work that lies ahead.

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.