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| ***Province*** | ***Législature*** | ***Session*** | ***Type de discours*** | ***Date du discours*** | ***Locuteur*** | ***Fonction du locuteur*** | ***Parti politique*** |
| Manitoba | 38e | 5e | Discours sur le Budget | 4 avril 2007 | Gregory F. Selinger | Ministre des Finances | New Democratic Party of Manitoba |

Manitoba is a changed province today. We have more nurses and doctors. Housing values are up. Education property taxes are down. Building cranes dot the skyline of downtown Winnipeg. The youth population is growing. Investments in highway construction are at their highest level in history, and new green energy opportunities are springing up across rural and northern Manitoba.

Working together, we have set a new course for our province. The strong capacity of Manitoba's business, labour and community leaders to work together for a common purpose means that no objective is too bold, no goal unattainable.

This year, we will build on our collective successes. Tomorrow's opportunities call for us to work even harder today.

Today's Building Budget focusses on Manitobans' priorities and lays out our longterm vision for:

·         better, faster health care, delivered closer to home

·         affordable, quality education and training

·         addressing climate change and preserving our water resources and the environment

·         building our roads and highways

·         making Manitoba a more attractive place for young people

·         growing our competitive advantages

·         investing in a green and growing economy

·         fighting poverty and removing barriers to employment

·         building healthier, safer and stronger communities

·         providing tax savings for Manitoba families and businesses, and

·         continuing with a sound fiscal plan.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud that our government is the first in 50 years to achieve eight balanced budgets, seven consecutive budgets under balanced budget legislation, and for the first time today, we are presenting a Summary Budget which fully reflects generally accepted accounting principles, commonly known as GAAP, the first in Manitoba's history.

Last year, Manitoba's solid economic perfor­mance outpaced Canada's on several fronts:

·         overall economic growth of 3.1 percent

·         21 percent growth in construction work

·         growth in total exports of 17 percent

·         a 22 percent increase in building permits, and

·         capital investment growth of 14 percent.

Manitoba's unemployment rate fell to a 30year low in 2006. More Manitobans are working than ever before, after our employment level rose to a new record high in 2006. Some 6,700 new jobs were created last year, almost 90 percent of which were in the private sector. Additionally, housing starts topped 5,000, the highest level in almost two decades.

Manufacturing in Manitoba showed great strength in 2006, despite the competitive pressures of a high Canadian dollar. Manitoba manufacturers shipped over $14 billion in goods last year, setting a new alltime record high. Budget 2007 introduces new measures to strengthen competitiveness and productivity.

Manitoba is off to a strong start in 2007. Residential construction is increasing. Real estate sales continue to grow. Manufacturing job growth is strong, and weekly earnings are growing faster than the national average. Business confidence is high and our survey of private sector economic forecasters shows that real economic growth in Manitoba is expected to outpace the national average in 2007, as it did in 2006.

Now, more than ever, Manitoba is building for the future: new health care facilities, new schools and campus buildings, water and sewer upgrades and unprecedented investments in our roads and highways. The buzz of heavy construction speaks to the growth and prosperity of our province.

When we came into office, our hospitals, schools and universities were under terrible strain. Since then, rebuilding Manitoba's health care system has been our top priority. Our government has invested over $1 billion to build and modernize health care facilities and install new diagnostic equipment throughout the province. This includes a longoverdue new hospital for Brandon, a fully modernized stateoftheart Health Sciences Centre, a new hospital in Swan River and major renovations to Concordia, Seven Oaks, Gimli and Ste. Anne hospitals. This month, a major redevelopment of Victoria General Hospital will begin, including expanded emergency and new oncology departments.

We have also invested in our schools, colleges and universities, improving the infrastructure that supports learning and research.

      Our $50million pledge to the University of Manitoba's capital campaign helped trigger $187 million in private and community fundraising. We hope to repeat this success with our new pledge of up to $25 million for the University of Winnipeg to support projects like the new Richardson College for the Environment.

**\*** (15:30)

Le Manitoba a aussi investi dans le nouveau campus du collège Red River, situé rue Princess, dans le déménagement du collège communautaire Assiniboine au site North Hill de Brandon et dans l'amélioration des installations du Collège universitaire du Nord, de l'Université de Brandon et du Collège universitaire de SaintBoniface.

***Translation***

*Manitoba has also invested in Red River College's new Princess Street campus, relocating Assiniboine Community College to Brandon's North Hill, and improving facilities for the University College of the North, Brandon University and Collège universitaire de SaintBoniface.*

***English***

With our eight budgets, we have provided more than $423 million in capital funding for public schools. This is twice as much as was provided during the previous eightyear period.

Last year, Manitoba provided its highest level of highways support, $257 million, up from $177 million in 1999. This year, the renewal of highway infrastructure is taking on even greater priority. Mr. Speaker. Budget 2007 provides a 50 percent increase over last year, bringing annual provincial highways investment close to $400 million.

Today's budget will advance work on redeveloping Highway 75, the TransCanada Highway, northern roads and Highways 2, 3, 6, 8, 16 and 59.

Budget 2007 also funds the purchase of 21 snowplow/sanding trucks to assist with snow removal, sanding and deicing across Manitoba's 19,000 kilometres of highways.

We are also investing to build the first leg of an allweather road on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, a key infrastructure priority for the region. Improving access to remote communities is a priority and a challenge made even more important as a result of the adverse impacts of climate change. We will work with remote communities and the federal government to improve road and air access.

This year marks 10 years since the 1997 flood. We are building on the foresight of the original floodway vision, having secured a 5050 funding partnership with the federal government to complete the entire Floodway Expansion Project. Since construction began a year and a half ago, more than onethird of the channel excavation work has been completed. Manitobans now enjoy protection against a flood equal to the greatest in recorded Manitoba history.

Today, there are great demands for municipal and community infrastructure. Budget 2007 allocates a record $33 million under existing costshared agreements. This investment will allow munici­palities to advance infrastructure and other priorities, such as Winnipeg's waste water and treatment upgrade and Grand Rapids' sewer and water project; recreation/wellness centres in Swan River, The Pas, and West St. Paul; and YM/YWCA facilities in Brandon and in north and south Winnipeg. Our government will work with the federal government on guidelines for new infrastructure spending.

During the 1990s, Manitoba lost 100 doctors and 1,500 nurses, signs of a seriously troubled health care system.

Today we are training more health care professionals, investing in new equipment and modern facilities and making better use of every dollar we spend. Today's budget will advance our joint efforts with health care providers to reduce wait times for vital health care services.

Budget 2007 provides ongoing support for the expanded 100student Faculty of Medicine class, an increased 25space licensing program for international medical graduates and more than 50 new technologist training seats, and 3,000 nurses are in training here in Manitoba today.

Budget 2007 also invests $3 million in new funding for physician specialist training, including emergency room doctors, oncologists and pedia­tricians.

Our investments over seven years have now succeeded in restoring the number of nurses who were lost to the funding cuts of the 1990s. Mr. Speaker, we are proud that 1,500 more nurses are back to work providing valuable frontline patient care in our province. Today's budget also provides new funding for additional nurse practitioner positions.

Building on the gains we have made in reducing wait times for critical life and death treatments, we are expanding our investment to reduce wait times for key qualityoflife procedures and diagnostic tests.

According to a recent report from the Canadian Institute for Health Information, Manitoba has the shortest wait time for cardiac bypass surgery in the country at 13 days and is a leader for radiation therapy with a median wait time of one week, down from six weeks in 1999.

Tel que cela a été recommandé dans le rapport Koshal, le Manitoba investit dans un nouveau centre d'excellence de soins cardiaques d'avantgarde à l'Hôpital général SaintBoniface.

***Translation***

*As recommended by the Koshal report, Manitoba is investing in a new stateoftheart Cardiac Centre of Excellence at St. Boniface General Hospital.*

***English***

Manitoba's strategy to make further progress on cancer wait lists involves modernizing our medical technology infrastructure, including linear accel­eration radiation therapy units in Winnipeg and Brandon. It also involves programs for early detection and prevention, including cancer screening and HPV vaccination.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to announce that we are installing a new leadingedge noninvasive cancer knife, the first in Canada, to treat cancers in all parts of the body. This new cancer knife builds on the Gamma knife's technology which has been highly successful in treating brain cancer.

Manitoba had only two MRI machines in 1999. Our government has invested in five new MRI machines, making this effective diagnostic test more accessible to more Manitobans.

Over the past year, the wait time for CT scans has been reduced by 25 percent. Our government has increased the number of CT scanners to 20 from 9, including eight more in rural Manitoba.

By introducing an innovative tworoom operating model and making better use of clinical assistants, Concordia Hospital's Centre of Excellence for hip and knee surgery is performing almost three times as many surgeries as a standard operating room. Mr. Speaker, since July 2005 the median wait time for orthopedic surgery has been reduced by 50 percent. We have also established orthopedic prehab clinics in Winnipeg, Boundary Trails and Brandon.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that significant new resources will be invested to open a new Manitoba Firefighters Burn Unit at the Health Sciences Centre, providing improved care for burn victims and honouring Manitoba's firefighters.

Nous avons ouvert de nouveaux centres de soins de santé primaires à Waterhen et à Camperville, ainsi que de nouveaux centres d'accès communautaires à Brandon, à River East et à Transcona.

***Translation***

*New primary health care centres have been opened in Waterhen and Camperville, and new Access centres opened in Brandon, River East and Transcona.*

***English***

Mr. Speaker, we will build a new Access centre in northwest Winnipeg, integrating communitybased health care and social services to better meet community needs.

A new women's health centre has been opened at Victoria Hospital to provide expanded services. A new personal care home has been opened in Thompson, and another will be built in Neepawa.

L'Unité Marguerite, une nouvelle aile au Foyer Valade, est maintenant ouverte et fournira des soins communautaires aux résidents francophones atteints de la maladie d'Alzheimer ou de démence.

***Translation***

*L'Unité Marguerite, the new wing of Foyer Valade, has opened to provide communitybased care for francophone residents living with Alzheimer's disease or dementia.*

***English***

Providing quality care for Manitoba seniors living in the community and in longterm care settings continues to be a priority. Budget 2007 provides new funding to expand Manitoba's longterm care strategy in rural and northern Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2007 invests in a major new health care enhancement for the people of Selkirk and the surrounding region. We will build a new hospital in Selkirk.

We are continuing to advance the Chronic Disease Prevention Initiative, with a major focus on tackling chronic disease in First Nations communities. The Health Council of Canada recently singled out the Island Lake Regional Renal Program as a strong example of successful collaboration and innovation in First Nations health care. Manitoba is committed to working with Aboriginal communities and the federal government to close the gap between Aboriginal and other Canadian citizens.

Mr. Speaker, we know that health outcomes depend not only on quality health care but also on healthy living.

Manitoba was the first province to introduce a provincewide smoking ban and we have seen important reductions in teen smoking rates. We are currently working with schools on nutrition guidelines and physical education and expanding public recreation opportunities. We are also working to bring down rates of diabetes in Manitoba's Aboriginal population.

Since launching the Manitoba in Motion program a year and a half ago, more than 50 communities and 425 schools have signed up to make physical activity an important part of daily life. Recent initiatives include:

·         new resources for parents with tips on how to encourage kids to get active

·         a popular lowcost bike helmet program, and

·         new healthy living scholarships for student volunteers.

Today's budget also implements Manitoba's Children's Fitness Tax Credit to encourage greater participation by children in physical activity. Budget 2007 also fulfills our commitment to increase funding for Sport Manitoba by $1 million.

Budget 2007 invests new resources for healthy living programs, including:

·         establishing two new teen clinics

·         providing new resources for suicide prevention, and

·         investing more than $2.5 million in new funding to address sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS.

Investments in quality education for our children and youth are key to Manitoba's future. High school graduation rates have increased to 84 percent from 73 percent since 1999.

In each of the last eight years, our government has met or exceeded our commitment to fund public schools at the rate of economic growth. Mr. Speaker, this year's increase of $30.3 million is the largest increase in almost two decades. New funding will  support:

·         Aboriginal academic achievement

·         specialneeds education

·         English as an additional language and support for waraffected children, and

·         French language education.

      Budget 2007 includes a new public schools education plan as part of our strategy to reduce education property taxes.

**\*** (15:40)

University and college enrolment is up by onethird, supported by a 10 percent tuition reduction. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce the continuation of the 10 percent tuition reduction, and, as we have done in every year, we are providing fully offsetting revenue to universities and colleges tied directly to enrolment, a total of $95 million since 2000.

Last year, we significantly increased our support for postsecondary education with the largest ever commitment of $60 million over three years. Included in this commitment was a promise for a 5 percent funding increase for 200708. We were disappointed that the recent federal budget did not fully restore the postsecondary education funding that was cut beginning in 1996. Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, Budget 2007 exceeds our promise to universities and colleges by providing an average funding increase of 7 percent this year. Raising our funding increase from 5 percent to 7 percent will give universities and colleges extra funding. This two percentage point increase is equivalent to at least a 4 percent tuition fee increase. This means that students will not have to pay more, while universities and colleges will benefit.

This year, we will also engage First Nations and communities in the northern Interlake region to explore the feasibility of expanding local training opportunities.

Budget 2007 also commits more than $2 million in new resources for key training and skills priorities, including growing apprenticeship training, expanding sector councils and more flexible funding to meet critical skills shortages.

Budget 2007 also provides new resources for literacy.

Our government recognizes the need to increase efforts to grow our population and keep our communities and economy strong.

Labour force expansion is key to competitiveness. Manitoba's performance over the last seven years has been strong. In comparison to the 1990s:

·         our labour force has grown at nearly three times the '90s rate

·         our employment has increased more than twice as fast.

In the past seven years, net migration added more than 3,200 young people to our population. This is a real improvement over the net loss of more than 2,500 young people experienced between 1992 and 1999.

While Manitoba's population has continued to grow, we are committed to achieving even stronger results.

In previous budgets, we introduced the Manitoba Coop Education Tax Credit and Graduates Hiring Incentive. These programs are helping students, graduates and employers by supporting work placements and permanent hiring in a wide range of sectors.

Mr. Speaker, our government has introduced a major new initiative to attract and retain youth, a 60 percent income tax rebate on tuition fees for all postsecondary graduates who live and work in Manitoba. The new rebate makes postsecondary education an even higherreturn investment and encourages our youth to put down roots and establish their careers here in our province of Manitoba. It will also serve as a powerful recruitment tool for business in a highly competitive job market.

The Premier's Economic Advisory Council's Aboriginal Summit highlighted the many ways in which Manitoba's growing Aboriginal population represents an important resource for our growing economy. Budget 2007 provides increased resources to Manitoba's Aboriginal Education Directorate and creates a new young Aboriginal entrepreneur initiative to provide assistance with business development costs.

Investments in Aboriginal education and labour force development are delivering remarkable results.

·         Aboriginal student enrolment in universities and colleges is up 77 percent and 59 percent respectively since 1999.

·         Aboriginal apprenticeship registrations have tripled, and

·         the number of employed offreserve Aboriginal people jumped by an impressive 30 percent between 2001 and 2005.

Métis businesses are playing a major role on the Floodway Expansion, and new Métis businesses are being launched with support from the Louis Riel Capital Corporation's Build a Business program, in partnership with SEED Winnipeg. Manitoba will work with the Manitoba Métis Federation to undertake the development of a new Métis economic development strategy.

Early in our government's mandate, we accepted the recommendation of the Premier's Economic Advisory Council to make immigration a central feature of our economic strategy, adding to Manitoba's rich multicultural flavour.

Our government had set a bold target to attract 10,000 immigrants to Manitoba annually, and last year we exceeded that goal. Manitoba's immigration was up 24 percent in 2006, its highest level in half a century, and far exceeded national performance. Mr. Speaker, based on this success, our government has committed to another bold target, to double our current immigration level over the next ten years.

Monsieur le Président, j'ai le grand plaisir d'annoncer que le Budget 2007 consacre plus de 9,5 millions de dollars de fonds nouveaux à l'amélioration des services d'établissement et d'intégration au marché du travail, des programmes de formation linguistique, et des initiatives de promotion de l'ethnoculturalisme et de lutte contre le racisme, le tout appuyé par des ressources du gouvernement fédéral.

***Translation***

*Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that Budget 2007 provides more than $9.5 million in new funding to enhance settlement services, language training, labour market integration and ethnocultural and antiracism initiatives, supported by federal resources.*

***English***

      Manitoba's thriving and diverse arts and cultural scene makes our province a more exciting place for youth, providing lively attractions for Manitoba families and outofprovince visitors. New economic opportunities abound in Manitoba's vibrant cultural industries. Manitoba is proud to be the second highest per capita funder of cultural events in Canada.

The firstofitskind ManitoAhbee Festival celebrating Aboriginal arts and culture was held in Manitoba in 2006, showcasing our rich Aboriginal heritage.

Manitobans also showed off their spirited energy during the CFL's Grey Cup championship game in Winnipeg.

This week, Manitobans are getting the chance to cheer on Team Canada at the MTS Centre and in Selkirk as Manitoba plays host to the World Women's Hockey Championships

Manitoba's highly competitive tax regime for film has helped our local industry to blossom. Budget 2007 renews the popular Manitoba film tax credit for another three years and also increases our investment in Manitoba Film and Sound.

Manitoba has already made a major commitment of $1.3 million in endowment funding for the Manitoba Theatre Centre, an important part of Manitoba's rich cultural life. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to announce that today's budget provides new resources to strengthen some of our other important heritage institutions and premiere tourist attractions, including:

·         major renewal initiatives at The Manitoba Museum

·         capital investments at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, and

·         a new partnership with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet to match private fundraising for new ballet creations.

Le Budget 2007 ajoute aussi le Musée de SaintBoniface aux établissements admissibles au Programme manitobain des musées représentatifs.

***Translation***

*Budget 2007 also adds the St. Boniface Museum to Manitoba's Signature Museum Program.*

***English***

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that Budget 2007 invests in three new public libraries for Selkirk, the R.M. of Swan River and the R.M. of Alexander.

Manitoba's competitive business environment includes a welleducated, productive and multilingual labour force, among the lowest electricity rates in the world, affordable taxes and low construction costs.

Manitoba's capital investment grew 14 percent last year, the second highest among provinces, and is expected to be above 11 percent this year. Budget 2007 broadens the Community Enterprise Development Tax Credit to include a new 30 percent tax credit for direct investments in emerging enterprises requiring large amounts of capital.

Manitoba has a rapidly growing network of research facilities, including high caliber clusters in areas such as agrifood research and advanced medicine. Budget 2007 provides increased funding for Manitoba Centres of Excellence to support more worldclass research.

Manitoba's information and communications technology industry continues to grow, attracting many young entrepreneurs. Manitoba's video game industry has grown by more than fivefold in the last two years. There are now more than 230 digital media companies in the province. Our government is investing in further growth in this vibrant sector through the Manitoba Interactive Digital Media Fund.

Red River College's new Centre for Applied Research in Sustainable Infrastructure is the province's first dedicated collegebased research facility and will advance practical research on construction and building technologies.

Manufacturing is a vital part of Manitoba's diversified economy, accounting for approximately 12 percent of GDP. In our last budget, we renewed and enhanced the Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit. Capital investments in manufacturing grew by more than 16 percent in Manitoba last year, with a further 30 percent increase expected in 2007.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2007 makes the Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit even more valuable by increasing refundability to 50 percent. Manitoba is also paralleling a shortterm federal incentive that allows manufacturers and processors to write off machinery at 50 percent per year.

We are taking action to reduce red tape for business, working to:

·         extend the use of the single business number identifier to organizations like the WCB

·         expand awardwinning BizPaL services to more municipalities

·         make it easier and less costly for business to deal with tax filing

·         introduce online filing for the PST, and

·         make trucking permits accessible elec­tronically.

**\*** (15:50)

Safe and healthy workplaces make good sense for workers, families and  employers. Not only do we want workers to stay safe, we want the competitive business advantages that come with safe and healthy workplaces.

Our government has implemented a proactive, multistaged plan to improve occupational safety and health, based on a consultative approach with labour and employers, including:

·         amending The Workplace Safety and Health Act

·         increasing inspections of highrisk sectors

·         updating workplace safety and health regulations

·         modernizing The Workers Compensation Act, and

·         expanding the list of presumptive diseases for firefighters.

There has been a reduction of close to 20 percent in the timeloss work injury rate in Manitoba since 2000. Working together, we need to make further improvements to reduce workplace injuries. Today's budget increases the number of workplace safety and health officers.

Our government will soon be introducing legislation to establish a new statutory holiday in the month of February for all Manitobans to enjoy.

Manitoba has been a strong voice in support of the Canadian Wheat Board, demanding that farmers have a say in matters critical to their livelihood. We have echoed producers' concerns about the significant economic consequences of dismantling singledesk marketing and the importance of ensuring quality and consistency for world markets. We will continue to promote the Port of Churchill as a viable, costeffective option for prairie farmers and fight to keep the Wheat Board's Winnipeg head office. Mr. Speaker, Manitoba will continue to stand up for the interests of farmers.

Our government remains committed to maintaining a responsive safety net for farmers. The CAIS program has paid out more than $550 million in federalprovincial support for farmers over the last three years.

Supporting young farmers is vitally important to the longterm prosperity of farming in Manitoba. Budget 2007 invests in farm renewal through:

·         an increase to the young farmer rebate on MASC loans

·         a new training program to assist young women to be more active in farm enterprises, and

·         enhancements to the Bridging Generations Initiative, making it easier to transfer farms from one generation to the next.

Budget 2007 invests new dollars to promote food safety and awareness and emergency preparedness planning. Today's budget also introduces a new Safe Farm pilot program.

Budget 2007 increases provincial support for the Food Development Centre in Portage la Prairie to encourage the development of new food products and their commercialization.

Rural Manitobans are seizing new market opportunities in biofuels. Budget 2007 broadens eligibility for MASC's Alternative Energy Loan program.

Husky's $145million ethanol plant expansion at Minnedosa, supported by Manitoba's ethanol mandate, will provide a new green market for Manitoba farmers.

Biodiesel plant development and construction is already underway at four sites in Manitoba. Our vision is for Manitoba to be a leader in biodiesel production, creating jobs, expanding markets for farmers and spurring greater economic activity in our rural communities.

Manitoba is also providing funding for rural pilot projects to construct and test the feasibility of anaerobic digesters on hog farms.

Our government is working alongside industry to study the feasibility of C02 enhanced oil recovery in Manitoba, an opportunity for economic growth and reduced emissions.

Our government is working with northern Manitobans to provide better access to education and training, increased economic development and more employment opportunities in the North.

Today's budget provides additional dollars to expand educational programming through the University College of the North, UCN, including 50 new nursing spaces. In addition, we have recently committed $45 million to enhance UCN's capital facilities in The Pas and Thompson and to establish new regional centres in Grand Rapids and Oxford House.

Our First Nations and Métis partners have been empowered to deliver their own training under the $60million Hydro preproject training initiative, which has already provided training to close to 1,200 people. Early construction work on the Wuskwatim site is already employing 200 people, twothirds of whom are of Aboriginal descent.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba's mining industry is flourishing, supported by strong metals prices and a very attractive policy environment for mining investment. Mining grew by a significant 25 percent last year in Manitoba. I am pleased to announce that Budget 2007 extends Manitoba's 10 percent Mineral Exploration Tax Credit for another year.

Manitoba is working with the Government of Canada and First Nations to advance Treaty Land Entitlement transfers. Ownership of these lands by First Nations represents a tremendous opportunity for sustainable development and economic growth. Manitoba and Canada have recently reached agreement on an accelerated plan that will see 150,000 acres of provincial Crown land transferred each and every single year to First Nations in Manitoba.

Budget 2007 takes action on two fronts to tackle the persistent problem of higher costs for healthy foods in the North. First, we have increased the Northern Income Assistance Allowance to help relieve cost pressures on nutritious foods and other essentials. We are also investing in longterm solutions by expanding the popular Northern Healthy Foods Initiative, supporting family and community gardens, nutrition education and marketbased solutions.

Budget 2007 invests in new youthled activities that promote wellbeing and positive outcomes for youth in the North. Today's budget also provides funding to expand water safety programs to 25 new northern and remote communities in partnership with the Lifesaving Society.

With new support for roads and transit, growth in the Building Manitoba Fund and gaming revenue sharing, Budget 2007 provides significantly increased resources for Winnipeg, Brandon and other municipalities.

The City of Winnipeg will receive from Budget 2007 $29.1 million in new funding, an increase of 18.3 percent. This includes $21 million for road improvements, part of our new twoyear commitment to invest $50 million in Winnipeg's roads and bicycle routes. Provincial funding for streets will advance projects like the Chief Peguis Trail extension and major rehabilitations of the Fort Garry bridge and Inkster Boulevard. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that this new funding for road improvements will be built into the City of Winnipeg's base budget for future years.

Through the Building Manitoba Fund, other municipalities will receive a 5 percent general assistance funding increase in 2007 and a 17 percent increase in rural community development grants.

Renewal continues in our province's capital based on cooperative development efforts with the City of Winnipeg and partnerships with local communities. Building cranes have become a hallmark of downtown. Revitalization on Portage Avenue has moved from the MTS Centre to the new Manitoba Hydro headquarters and will move from there to the University of Winnipeg's new Science Centre.

Our government is having positive discussions with the federal government and the Friends of the Museum about moving forward with the great vision of building the Canadian Human Rights Museum at The Forks to further the understanding of human rights on an international scale.

Next month, the city of Brandon will celebrate its 125th birthday and there is much to celebrate. Brandon's economy is strong, with very low unemployment. The Keystone Centre's new Agricultural Centre of Excellence has opened its doors to the world. The downtown WellnessCentre is moving forward, and Assiniboine Community College's Culinary Arts and Hospitality Administration program will be ready to receive students at its newly redeveloped site this fall.

In 2003, Manitoba became the first province in Canada to introduce tax increment financing for urban revitalization. Just as we have worked with CentreVenture in redeveloping Winnipeg's down­town, we will work with the City of Brandon and community partners on downtown revitalization in Brandon.

Manitoba is also proceeding with a major infrastructure enhancement for the people of Brandon by providing the city with new bridges across the Assiniboine River to eliminate traffic bottlenecks and increase flood protection. Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to announce that Manitoba will work with the City of Brandon to advance Brandon's Eastern Access Route extension.

      One of our government's proudest achievements has been the success of Neighbourhoods Alive!, a key part of our community economic development strategy. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that Neighbourhoods Alive! is expanding into five more urban centres, including Dauphin, Flin Flon, The Pas, Portage la Prairie and Selkirk.

**\*** (16:00)

Today we are building a better future for children and families in Manitoba and stepping up efforts to combat poverty. Rates of child and adult poverty have fallen in Manitoba but not by nearly enough. There is much more to do.

Today there are 10,000 fewer Manitobans receiving income assistance than in 1999. Budget 2007 introduces Rewarding Work, a fouryear plan to help more people achieve employment and higher incomes.

In 1998, the federal government introduced the National Child Benefit for lowincome families, but this benefit was clawed back at the provincial level from families on income assistance. Our government corrected this injustice by ending the clawback and fully restoring the National Child Benefit, allowing almost $14 million annually to flow to families in need.

Mr. Speaker, today's budget takes another step forward by introducing a new Manitoba Child Benefit for lowincome families as part of Rewarding Work. The new benefit will provide more money for lowincome working families to help with the costs of raising their children. For families on income assistance, a separate child benefit will replace a portion of their existing childrelated assistance. This is a significant step to breaking down the "welfare wall" by ensuring that families retain supports for their children when they move from income assistance to work.

Budget 2007 also introduces a new Manitoba benefit which will complement the federal government's newly announced Working Income Tax Benefit program. Along with a workrelated transportation allowance, these new benefits will help the move from welfare to work. Beginning in January 2008, an increase of $25 per month will be provided for employment supports for childless couples and singles and new income assistance for persons with disabilities.

Based on recommendations made by the provincial Ombudsman and the Children's Advocate, Manitoba is significantly increasing the level of investment in our child protection system. Budget 2007 provides more than $48 million in new resources to improve child protection services, including funding for caseload reductions, increased funding for foster families and early interventions to support families before children are placed in care.

Our government continues to invest in children's early years, a time when research clearly shows that investments pay the biggest rewards, supporting kids to do better in school and avoid costly runins with the justice, health care and social services systems. Today's budget increases resources to:

·         support the special nutritional needs of moms and babies by expanding the Healthy Baby program to more communities

·         enhance positive parenting programs, and

·         support parentchild coalitions.

Budget 2007 also makes a major investment of $7.5 million to step up Manitoba's integrated programming related to fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

Our government announced the first FiveYear Plan for Child Care in 2002, a plan to improve the quality, accessibility and affordability of early learning and child care right across our province. Child care is also an important part of our plan to break down barriers for parents, particularly women, to return to work. Tremendous progress has been made. We have funded over 6,600 more childcare spaces, an increase of 43 percent.

In 2005, the governments of Canada and Manitoba negotiated and signed an agreement to provide new multiyear federal funding for child care and early learning. We are disappointed that the Government of Canada has chosen to unilaterally withdraw from our agreement. Under the agreement, Manitoba received $23 million last year, but based on the recent federal budget, we will only receive $9 million in 200708. While we will continue to make the case that the federal government should honour its commitments, we will not, however, sacrifice children and parents in this fight for federal support. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Budget 2007 increases the budget investment in child care by more than $14 million, and this $14 million will backfill the withdrawal of federal funds to ensure that the promises made to Manitoba families and communities are kept.

The new Manitoba Shelter Benefit is making a difference, providing support to more than 11,000 lowincome seniors, families and persons with disabilities to deal with rising shelter costs.

Manitoba is moving forward with a new multiyear affordable housing plan. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that Manitoba is committing $104 million for safe, secure, affordable housing through a partnership with the federal Housing Trust. Initiatives will target the housing needs of Aboriginal people, seniors, the inner city and northern Manitoba.

Budget 2007 invests another $18 million for supported living for persons with mental disabilities and $1.8 million more for children's special services.

Building on our newly introduced grandparents access legislation, today's budget provides additional resources to assist with requests by grandparents to spend time with their grandchildren in cases of parental separation.

Budget 2007 expands seniors community support services programs and increases the 55Plus income supplement, which will provide close to $2 million annually in new support for lowincome seniors.

Monsieur le Président, le Manitoba allégera également le fardeau fiscal des personnes âgées en appliquant au niveau provincial les modifications apportées par le gouvernement fédéral aux dispositions touchant le fractionnement du revenu de pension. Cette mesure procurera annuellement aux pensionnés des économies d'environ 11 millions de dollars.

***Translation***

*Mr. Speaker, Manitoba is also easing the tax burden for seniors by matching federal pension incomesplitting tax changes, saving pensioners an estimated $11 million annually.*

***English***

      The safety and wellbeing of Manitoba families and communities and the integrity and responsiveness of our justice system are priorities for our government.

We recognize the importance of having a strong police presence in our communities. Our government has provided resources for 94 new officer positions over the past five years. Mr. Speaker, today we are announcing plans to add 30 more police officers.

Budget 2007 provides funding for the City of Winnipeg to support 14 new officer positions. This includes five constables dedicated to Winnipeg's Stolen Auto Unit to deal specifically with repeat offenders. While auto theft is down 20 percent so far this year compared to last, we are committed to making further progress to curb this serious crime, including working with the federal government to strengthen criminal penalties. Funding for the City of Brandon will also support two new police officer positions. We will also work with the RCMP to add 14 more officers by January 1, 2008.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that Budget 2007 expands our successful Lighthouses program to 50 sites. Lighthouses provide positive afterhour recreation, education and social activities for youth in schools, friendship centres and other community facilities across our province. Manitoba Lighthouses are nearing half a million visits to date, a clear sign of youth responding to positive alternatives.

Today's budget further expands the Turnabout program, a first of its kind in Canada, which focusses on children under the age of 12 who come in conflict with the law.

Budget 2007 invests new resources to expand the successful School Resource Officer project. In partnership with the City of Winnipeg and the Winnipeg School Division, three additional police officers will serve Gordon Bell, Hugh John Macdonald, Kelvin, Grant Park and Churchill high schools and surrounding areas.

Manitoba is taking action to crack down on organized crime, Mr. Speaker. Budget 2007 doubles our investment to $800,000 annually in the Manitoba Integrated Organized Crime Task Force.

Budget 2007 provides new funding and staff to support Manitoba's Public Safety Investigations Unit.

We are also making new investments in a criminal property forfeiture unit to ensure that criminals do not benefit from crime.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2007 provides funding to create a specialized unit to handle child exploitation cases, including a new dedicated Crown attorney. This unit will take a proactive approach to address Internet luring and child pornography.

Our government is also taking further steps to tackle domestic violence by:

·         adding a new Judicial Justice of the Peace

·         expanding the Domestic Violence Inter­vention Unit, and

·         providing new resources for community agencies that support women and children who experience family violence, including Ikwe and A Woman's Place.

Budget 2007 expands the internationally recognized Front End Project. This expansion will help the court system work faster and more effectively in youth and nondomestic violence matters.

      Manitoba is continuing to work with pharmacists, retailers, police, first responders and addictions services to combat crystal meth. Budget 2007 commits new funding for the provincial Crystal Meth Strategy.

Manitoba was one of the first supporters of the Kyoto Accord and one of the first provinces to develop a comprehensive climate change action strategy. This year, Manitoba will introduce climate change legislation that will set out our plan for greenhouse gas reduction targets and that will put them in law for the first time in the history of the province.

Our government believes strongly in the economic, environmental and social benefits of developing our tremendous hydroelectric resource.

Manitoba's Limestone dam has proven to be a solid investment that continues to generate strong returns, supporting three major power sales to Northern States Power alone totaling $5.5 billion. Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to announce another power sale. Manitoba Hydro has just renewed a 100 megawatt export contract with Wisconsin Public Service Corporation.

Construction of the Wuskwatim dam is now underway in partnership with Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation. Based on the strength of growing export and domestic markets, Conawapa will be built and will boost exports and power our economy for generations to come, providing enormous economic opportunities for Aboriginal and northern communities.

      Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to keep Manitoba Hydro owned by Manitobans, for the benefit of Manitobans.

**\*** (16:10)

Our government also remains a strong advocate for an eastwest power grid. A national grid would allow Manitoba to transfer clean, reliable energy to neighbouring provinces and improve Canada's energy security and reliability. We are encouraged by federal support for this important national vision.

Our province also has become a leader in energy conservation. The Canadian Energy Efficiency Alliance has named Manitoba no. 1 in its annual rankings two years in a row. Since 1999, some 150,000 Manitobans have participated in Power Smart programs, reducing their energy bills and saving close to 300 megawatts of power. That's equivalent to building a "virtual" dam with more capacity than Wuskwatim.

This year, energy efficiency initiatives are being expanded to support more communitydriven projects. In Winnipeg's Centennial neighbourhood, local residents are taking action to revitalize their community through innovative home retrofit projects. This year, communitybased energy efficiency projects will be expanded to other neighbourhoods in Winnipeg, Brandon and the four First Nations of the Island Lake region.

Like hydroelectricity, wind power is clean and renewable and helps grow and diversify our power supply and our rural communities. I am pleased to report that Manitoba has just taken another major step in our strategy to harvest 1,000 megawatts of wind power over the next decade with a new call for wind projects totaling 300 megawatts.

Since 2002, Power Smart loans have helped Manitoba become a leader in geothermal heating and cooling systems. Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to announce that to further support the use of highly efficient green technology, Manitoba Hydro will be enhancing its Residential Earth Power loan program by increasing the loan limit to $20,000 and offering a reduced interest rate of 4.9 percent for the first five years of borrowing for other geothermal residential projects..

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that Budget 2007 introduces a new 10 percent Green Energy Manufacturing Tax Credit designed to encourage new and expanded production and use of green energy equipment, the first of its kind in Canada.

Manitoba's natural areas are an important part of our heritage and our way of life. Over the past year, we have expanded our vital network of protected areas with new and expanded Wildlife Management Area designations and the renewal of six provincial Park Services. Since 1999, approximately 855,000 hectares of land have been permanently protected in Manitoba, and we know that each hectare is worth 2.4 acres.

We are working with the City of Winnipeg to add further protected areas to our network. We are also working with the Manitoba Floodway Authority to establish a new Duff Roblin Provincial Park site that better recognizes the vision and legacy of Duff Roblin and is more accessible to Manitoba families.

Budget 2007 protects biodiversity by increasing Manitoba's annual contribution to the Nature Conservancy of Canada's conservation program by 50 percent to $300,000.

Our government has made an important commitment to ensure that First Nations on the east side of Lake Winnipeg have a greater role in deciding how resources are used in this unique region. Budget 2007 supports First Nationsled efforts to:

·         secure a UNESCO World Heritage designation, putting this spectacular region on the world map

·         as well, we will work with our First Nations partners to advance sustainable land use planning, and

·         promote unique attractions through a new communitydriven tourism development initiative.

Today's budget invests in improving services and facilities in parks and campgrounds, including:

·         expanded facilities and more staff at Birds Hill campground

·         more camping sites with electricity, and

·         lagoon upgrades at Big Whiteshell and West Hawk lakes.

Protecting the quality of our vast water resources is a top priority for Manitobans.

Protecting drinking water, improving the health of Lake Winnipeg and conserving water supplies are imperatives we must meet to ensure our water will be protected and preserved for generations to come. We cannot take this tremendous resource for granted.

Last fall, we announced the third phase of Manitoba's water protection plan, a plan based on shared responsibility, with all regions and all sectors doing their part.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce today that Budget 2007 invests more than $10 million in new funds to address recommendations of the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board, advance sewer and water projects and improve water management and flood protection. New funding will support:

·         managing nutrients to meet leadingedge regulations on nitrogen and phosphorus

·         additional staff for inspections and enforcement

·         enhanced watershed planning and program­ming, and

·         habitat enhancement

·         onsite waste water management and manure storage facilities

·         Manitoba Water Services Board projects

·         further scientific research on Lake Winnipeg and beneficial management practices, and, finally,

·         strengthening drainage licensing and enforcement with additional resources, up to $2.1 million.

This new funding also includes $2.5 million to help farmers to begin to adapt their operations to comply with new water protection regulations.

We will work with the federal government on plans to fully invest the $7 million they have announced for Lake Winnipeg.

As the Clean Environment Commission reviews our water protection plan, Manitobans are being asked for their input on how best to care for our water resources. In the meantime, we have put a pause on new and expanding hog barns in recognition of the rapid growth in this industry since the 1990s and the need for public confidence in the industry.

Mr. Speaker, with today's budget, our government has committed more than $130 million for water and waste water infrastructure projects across the province.

Budget 2007 meets our commitment to move to full summary budgeting and reporting, as recommended by Manitoba's Auditor General. Our Summary Budget consolidates government's core budget plans with projections for all Crown organizations. Today's budget fully reflects the GAAP requirements under the Canadian accounting standards.

Today's budget projects a Summary surplus of $175 million. In keeping with advice we have received from the office of the Auditor General and the review conducted by Deloitte and Touche, we will update our balanced budget legislation to ensure that it aligns with our full transition to GAAP. We are meeting this independent test of transparency and accountability to the people of Manitoba.

Manitoba's sound fiscal approach has been rewarded with four major credit rating upgrades since 1999.

In 2001, we began to implement the firstever plan to eliminate Manitoba's pension liability. Building on this, we have also recently announced our plan to help address the unfunded liability of the Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund, strengthening the pension plan and generating considerable longterm savings to the province. We are continuing to work on a similar solution for the unfunded liability of the Civil Service Superannuation Fund.

Manitoba's net debttoGDP ratio has been reduced by more than 20 percent, and we have reduced debtservicing costs by 45 percent from 13.2 cents on the dollar in 1999 to 7.3 cents today. Over the medium term, we are planning for continued reductions in Manitoba's net debttoGDP ratio.

Budget 2007 provides for a 4.8 percent growth in core expenditures, a 5.8 percent growth on a summary basis and a $110million payment on our general purpose debt and pension liabilities. This brings our total debt and pension payment over eight years to $814 million, the largest such payment in Manitoba's history.

Manitoba's Fiscal Stabilization Fund is projected to have a balance of $477 million at the end of 200607, $213 million more than in 19992000. As projected in last year's budget, the only draw from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund for 200708 is $37 million, and this is funding prepaid by the federal government for health waittimes reductions.

      As for our longterm plan on tax reductions, our previous seven budgets have contained the largest tax cuts ever delivered to Manitoba families and businesses.

      Since 1999, our multiyear taxcut plan has provided significant relief to all taxpayers, families, homeowners, farmers and businesses, along with targeted incentives for youth, seniors, lowincome families, environmental protection and manufacturing growth.

Budget 2007 contains $297 million in new annual tax cuts and introduces a multiyear plan in several areas, including:

·         new education property tax relief

·         new personal tax reductions, and

·         new business tax reductions.

When we came into office, housing values were flat and education property taxes were rising rapidly. We have taken action with our first seven budgets to reduce education property taxes, including:

·         eliminating one full property tax, the Residential Education Support Levy, saving taxpayers $100 million annually

·         increasing the Education Property Tax Credit by $150, and

·         reducing farmland education taxes by 60 percent, more than triple what we promised in the 2003 election.

**\*** (16:20)

Today's budget goes even further, implementing step one of our new plan to increase provincial funding to 80 percent of total public schools expenditures. We will make progress each and every year, and our goal is to achieve 80 percent at the end of five years, subject to balanced budget requirements. We will work with school boards to ensure accountability for provincial investments in affordable, quality education.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that the Education Property Tax Credit will be increased by an additional $125 to $525, representing annual savings of $40 million for Manitobans.

Including this new tax saving, education taxes have been reduced by an average of 16 percent since 1999 on a house valued at $125,000. This is in sharp contrast to the 1990s when education taxes increased by 60 percent.

We are also introducing a new fouryear plan to further reduce farmland education property taxes. Our plan will cut these farmland taxes by a total of 80 percent, a reduction that is four times our original promise. Starting in 2007, the Farmland School Tax Rebate will rise to 65 percent from 60 percent, providing savings of $29 million in 2007.

With these new measures and those contained in our past seven budgets, Manitobans will save $230 million annually in education property taxes.

Our government promised and has delivered multiyear tax reductions that have resulted in the largest personal income tax cuts in our province's history. Budget 2007 continues this progress with new savings for all Manitoba taxpayers. We are also committing to a plan to cut middle income taxes by 10 percent over four years, beginning with a number of new measures introduced with today's budget.

Mr. Speaker, we are:

·         adding $200 more to the basic personal Amount, bringing the total increase in this amount to $1,240 since 1999. The value of the basic personal credit has increased by 56 percent, almost three times the rate of inflation, and

·         increasing the spousal amount and eligible dependent amount by 24 percent to match the basic personal amount.

I am proud to report that a total of 6,000 lowincome Manitobans will be removed from the tax rolls as a result of these new measures.

Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to announce that effective January 1, 2008:

·         the middle income tax rate will be reduced to 12.75 percent, and

·         the upper threshold for the middle bracket will be increased to $66,000, the first step toward raising the threshold to $70,000.

In addition, starting January 1, 2009, we will begin implementing a multiyear plan to lower the first income rate to 10.5 percent and increase the first income threshold to $35,000. These changes will provide savings to all Manitoba families and taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, with today's personal income tax reductions and the measures we have taken in previous years, Manitobans will save $410 million annually in personal income taxes.

Small businesses are the backbone of Manitoba's economy. In 1999, Manitoba had the secondhighest small business tax rate at 8 percent. Today, as a result of our multiyear plan, Manitoba has the lowest small business tax rate at 3 percent.

Mr. Speaker, our government is pleased to announce that the small business rate will be reduced to 2 percent on January 1, 2008, and then cut again to 1 percent on January 1, 2009. These will bring our small business tax rates significantly below those of any other jurisdiction in Canada. These changes will benefit 80 percent of Manitoba corporations.

Our government has also taken significant steps to reduce the general corporation income tax rate. For the first time in 50 years, we brought in a multiyear plan to reduce this rate to 14 percent where it stands today, down from 17 percent in 1999, when it was the highest rate in the country. I am pleased to confirm that Budget 2007 builds on this plan with a further reduction of this rate to 13 percent, effective July 1, 2008. In addition, Mr. Speaker, this rate will be reduced to 12 percent, effective July 1, 2009.

In our last budget, we doubled the corporation capital tax deduction from $5 million to $10 million, reducing the number of firms paying this tax by 19 percent. I am pleased to confirm the first step in our plan to phase out entirely the corporation capital tax, a 20 percent reduction taking effect for fiscal years starting after January 1, 2008. Mr. Speaker, the general corporation capital tax will be fully eliminated before 2011.

Today's budget also increases the payroll tax exemption threshold for the Health and Postsecondary Education Tax Levy by 25 percent to $1.25 million. Less than 5 percent of employers presently pay this tax. The new higher threshold will benefit onethird of those paying. Two hundred employers will now be exempted altogether and 600 employers will pay less tax.

New measures in Budget 2007 represent business tax savings of $93 million annually, bringing our cumulative business tax reductions to $239 million since 1999.

To ensure continued fiscal responsibility, all tax measures effective after December 31, 2008, are subject to balanced budget requirements.

Mr. Speaker, the new tax measures contained in Budget 2007 and those introduced in our past seven years form the cornerstone of a decade of continuous action to reduce taxes. By 2010, Manitobans will enjoy annual savings in personal income, property and business taxes of $879 million compared to 1999.

Mr. Speaker, over the last eight years, our government has worked with Manitobans to achieve results.

We are rebuilding our health care system, investing in better roads and highways, expanding education opportunities, leading the country in climate change and clean water initiatives, growing our economy and supporting stronger families and safer communities.

We are doing all this, Mr. Speaker, while balancing our budgets, paying down the debt and delivering record tax relief for Manitobans.

Manitoba has become a leader in areas including green energy, immigration, affordability, culture and quality of life, healthy living, wait times reduction, child care and early childhood development.

Today's Building Budget lays out a longterm vision for infrastructure, housing, education, environmental protection, opportunities for youth, economic competitiveness, lowering taxes and sound fiscal management.

This is a record to build on. There is more to be done. We have laid out our vision for the future and we will work in partnership with all Manitobans to continue moving our province forward.

      Merci, Monsieur le Président.