

Roadmap for progress and prosperity



First, I want to thank the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce for arranging these dinners. They are a sign that we have a good foundation for continued collaboration on a common goal – growing Manitoba's economy.

Budget 2017 showed that the Pallister government is making headway on its top file – reducing the deficit, and getting to a balanced operating budget.

It has meant some shared pain. Budgets 2016 & 2017 were all about getting control of the unsustainable levels of spending that occurred in recent past years.

That is a daunting task. It is not easy – we all recognize that.

A lot of that hard work was done by the deputy ministers sitting with us at the tables tonight. So again, thank you to each of them.

The progress we make on containing costs underpins the way forward, because it is all about growing the economy.

Clearly, there's work yet to be done, but I think we are at a place where we can see the road turning.

And that allows us to look beyond the immediate, to where we need to go as we pave the path to new prosperity and growth for Manitoba.

Because the destination cannot be economic stability; it must be sustained economic prosperity.

And on that point, I need to say that while we all can – and have – rallied to the job of controlling unsustainable spending, there is a distinct and critical difference between spending and investing.

Spending is not guided by goals of economic return. It may produce no good results and/ or no real benefit. While it might be tracked, the effect of 'spending' on GDP, is not the preferred approach.

Investing, however, is a well-established strategic approach, which focuses on verifiable returns to the economy, returns that are measurable.

And so just as with any smart, nimble company, governments have to both plan and invest.

So a game plan of restraint or austerity, while necessary to contain a problem or threat, cannot itself be the economic plan.

Similarly, restraining investment in infrastructure is not only unsustainable, it is counterproductive.

We need an investment strategy that harnesses available public funds, and/ or leverages private-sector dollars, to support sustainable economic growth.

Their success generates the revenues required to sustain, or improve upon, existing quality of life programs. Without those growing revenues, that discussion is rendered moot.

On that point, time and again, infrastructure investment has been shown to be a key driver supporting economic growth.

I now want to ask you to pick up that leaflet sitting next to your place setting that we dropped at the tables.

The first side repeats 6 principles the MHCA has offered governments to guide infrastructure investment strategies.

Can I ask you to turn to the flip side?

Here you will find a check list of some of the very real challenges facing the province and municipalities relating to infrastructure.

And, it itemizes those things we can do to continue down the road to make Manitoba 'the most improved jurisdiction'- the provincial government's end objective.

Those priorities include:

- Making public the provincial infrastructure investment deficit, to set the benchmark for progress;
- Setting out a strategy to address the infrastructure deficit – long-term – focusing on the investments that will return dividends to growing the economy; and
- Striking a new fiscal deal between the provincial government and the municipalities – municipalities collect only 8 cents of every tax dollar; they can't shoulder the burden alone.

We need to transition in a shared, balanced and fair "new fiscal deal", 21st-Century solution crafted to address 21st-Century challenges and opportunities.

I don't think I need to remind anyone here that infrastructure is at the summit of the public's priorities.

Let's harness the public sentiment to make a new fiscal deal to get us to a sustainable solution, to bring Manitoba's infrastructure to a level expected of, and in, first-class, modern communities.

Lastly, may I say that while the above 6 principles guide investment in infrastructure, they are principles that support economic growth.

We submit that they are very important to any government that has, as its ultimate goal, economic prosperity and bettering the quality of life, and standard of living, of all its citizens.

Thank you for this opportunity.

