

Speaking notes

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Civic Leaders' Dinner – Wpg Chamber of Commerce

April 13, 2023

Mr. Mayor, Councillors, ladies and gentlemen

Let me begin with collective thanks to Loren Remillard and the Chamber for hosting the Annual Civic Leaders Dinner of which we are a founding and continuing sponsor. This is an important evening.

And 2023 is an important political year for our province. We have a new council led by Mayor Gillingham; and we are just a little over 5 months away from a provincial election.

Given the above, let me suggest two critical areas that should capture *our advocacy attention*.

The 1st is that ***growing the economy is job #1*** for every government, as the foundational pillar upon which budgets are constructed, **concurrent** with socially progressive and environmentally responsible policies.

Simply put, we simply cannot allow those who are struggling for footholds in their lives - for whatever reason - to miss the benefits of growth.

Nor can we ignore the imperatives of environmentally responsible policies, to reduce our carbon footprint and manage finite natural resources.

Any budget that falls short of those goals is frankly self-defeatist.

But, without economic growth, any discussion around the enhancement of existing, or introduction of new programs, is moot.

Winnipeg and Manitoba's decision to *co-invest* in CentrePort Canada for example is key. Our economy is based on trade; we sit geographically at our country's centre of domestic, continental and global trade routes.

The decision to advance extending Chief Peguis and expand Kenaston Blvd is yet another signal that Winnipeg aspires to move its trade profile to a global platform.

So, we congratulate Mayor Gillingham and Councillors for adopting Budget 2023 which addressed those priorities.

Premier Stefanson's Budget 2023 also provided a strong mix of commitment to growth, and steps to help alleviate financial pressure on those most directly affected by the impacts of COVID inflation's punishment.

Let me suggest that a 2nd area of priority is commitment from each of the three party leaders to the negotiation of a ***new funding model*** between the provincial and municipal governments, and by extension Ottawa.

Manitoba's announcement to increase base grants to all municipalities was welcome, but only a first step of a necessary new funding-model discussion.

The announcement acknowledged the constrained abilities of Winnipeg - *all municipalities* - to meet service demands with the limited resources they now have, without a more proportionate sharing of wealth generated by their citizens.

Consider that the Capital Region hosts 67% of the population and contributes 65% to the provincial GDP. This economic powerhouse should benefit from a greater share of the revenues spun off from its '*economic eco-system*', enabling greater growth.

Given the pending provincial election, let's press the party leaders to commit to voters to negotiate a ***new funding model***.

Can we succeed?

Remember Mayor Gillingham's recent address at the Chamber's State of the City lunch. In it he challenged us, quoting Winnipeg's poet laureate, to strive with '***relentless hope***.'

So, let's all of us commit ***to progress***, and work together, with '***relentless hope***.'

Thank you for your attention.