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Put growing the economy first

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There is a simple truth too often lost in political debate: growing the economy is job No. 1 for every level of government. Not because it is the only priority, but because it enables all others.

Economic growth is what makes funding health care, housing, infrastructure and social supports possible.

This is not an ideological argument, it is a practical one.

Without sustained growth, governments cannot maintain the services that define quality of life.

Growth is not everything, but without it, everything else becomes harder.

This view is no longer limited to stakeholders. Political leaders are increasingly aligned. In 2022, then-Winnipeg mayoral candidate Scott Gillingham emphasized growth.

A year later, Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew put it plainly: “the economic horse pulls the social cart.”

Events since 2024 have reinforced that reality.

Global instability, supply chain disruptions and shifting trade dynamics have forced governments to refocus on resilience, building domestic capacity, investing in infrastructure and competing more aggressively for growth.

Manitoba has responded. The province now has an economic development strategy and its 2026/27 budget commits to a single- window agency to deliver it.

At the same time, a Manitoba delegation representing five leading business organizations, and supported by Kinew, recently met with federal officials in Ottawa to advocate for investment.

Their message was clear: strategic infrastructure investment in Manitoba is key to scaling Canada’s growth and resilience.

Nationally, the federal government is sharpening its approach.

Prime Minister Mark Carney’s government has signalled a strong focus on trade, energy, and nation-building infrastructure, with an emphasis on building a more independent and resilient economy, as evidenced in the April 28 spring economic update.

That is the new reality. No country, province or city can afford to sit on the sidelines.

Which brings us to Winnipeg. As senior governments align around growth, the city must do the same. This is not about politics, it is about co-ordination. Regardless of differing views, Winnipeg must partner with provincial and federal governments to attract investment and opportunity.

Right now, that alignment is not strong enough.

Winnipeg lacks a clear, high-level focus on economic development within its public service and political structure.

In a competitive environment where cities are vying for talent, capital and infrastructure dollars, that lack of focus is a serious liability.

The solution is straightforward: create a deputy chief administrative officer for economic development, reporting through the chief administrative officer to the mayor and a standing committee of council, with a clear mandate to drive growth.

No major Canadian city has taken this step.

Winnipeg can, and should be the first. This is not about expanding bureaucracy. It is about focus, accountability and results.

A dedicated senior leader would ensure economic growth is not diluted across departments but treated as the central priority it must be.

The benefits go beyond growth itself. A city with a clear, disciplined economic strategy strengthens its credibility with other orders of government, critical as Winnipeg pursues a new fiscal deal with Manitoba to sustain services and infrastructure.

So the question is not whether this matters, but whether there is any credible argument against it.

Does anyone seriously believe economic growth should not be government's top job? That Winnipeg should not have a clear growth strategy? Or that it should not be led at the highest level, with real authority?

Of course not. The path forward is clear. What remains is the political will to act.

With municipal elections approaching, this is a moment for leadership.

Winnipeg's mayor and councillors can make economic growth a defining commitment, or explain why they did not.

The stakes are too high for hesitation. Put growing the economy first. Everything else depends on it.

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