

Presentation to the Legislative Committee on Bill 30

The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment
Act, 2009

June 4, 2009



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By The Manitoba Teachers' Society

My name is Pat Isaak and I am president of The Manitoba Teachers' Society. We represent 15,000 public school teachers in the Province of Manitoba. Thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation to the Legislative Committee considering this Bill.

Education is at the core of our success as a province and a nation. Teachers understand the challenges we face today. We're preparing our students to use technologies that have yet to be invented in order to do jobs that don't yet exist, amidst uncertain economic times. We're nurturing their understanding of community in order to be citizens of a country that embraces the diversity of the world. And we know that our job is only the start. If our students and communities are to be all they can be, then public education is only the beginning of a lifelong experience in growing and learning.

I am here to support Bill 30. Education program and service delivery by public schools to students throughout our province requires the support of the provincial treasury. As several presenters have said before me, this Bill does not authorize the Minister of Finance to stop making a yearly debt retirement payment for three fiscal years, but gives the Minister discretion as to the amount of the annual payment. Any suggestion that the province of Manitoba is experiencing an unduly sharp rise in annual operating expenditures is ridiculous. As many economists have noted, the rate of increase in Manitoba's provincial expenditure per capita remains among the lowest in Canada.

The Manitoba Teachers' Society believes that this amendment makes sound fiscal sense. Several Canadian provinces are experiencing downturns in revenues. In such an uncertain fiscal environment, it is prudent for the Minister of Finance of Manitoba to have discretion in relation to the yearly amount of the debt retirement payment.

Our research found that the TD bank, as well as other major Canadian financial institutions, has not criticized the Manitoba government for reducing the amount of its debt down payment in these uncertain economic times.

Like many economists, MTS agrees that fiscal stimulus is required in these economic times. The Manitoba Teachers' Society is pleased that this government has kept a commitment made early in its mandate to benchmark public school funding to the rate of economic growth. It's a promise this government has fulfilled and exceeded – and it's one we especially appreciate in these difficult economic times.

We are pleased that the Manitoba government has demonstrated that it views funding public schools as an investment in our province's future. This year they increased funding to public schools by 4.8 per cent or \$43.9 million, for the 2009 - 2010 school year.

This is in sharp contrast to what occurred during the economic downturn of the nineties. The previous government's annual public school funding announcements of 0 and minus 2 per cent significantly harmed public schooling in this province.

Teachers view this government's funding increases despite uncertain economic times, as a signal that it considers the long-term benefits of education. This government is focusing on the future, while clearly being mindful of the present.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide the views of Manitoba teachers.

Respectfully submitted,
Pat Isaak
President
The Manitoba Teachers' Society