



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

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From the Throne to the Kitchen Table

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Are the priorities of the Manitoba government in line with Manitobans' more broadly? This is the question asked last week by a diverse group of community volunteers, representing teachers, healthcare professionals and those concerned about climate change, poverty and income inequality. They were comparing the vision presented in the recent Speech from the Throne with what they have been hearing in workplaces and communities while working towards the upcoming 2020 *Alternative Provincial Budget (APB)*.

APB volunteers are learning that there's support for a fair distribution of income and wealth; restoring labour rights; protecting public services and the environment, with a just transition to green jobs; and, reconciliation with Indigenous communities. Some of these goals could be seen as compatible with the guarantees in the Throne Speech (lower taxes, new jobs, better health care sooner, new schools and a made-in-Manitoba climate and green plan). But a closer reading of the speech raises differences in approach and focus. For example, this government is changing our tax system to put "more money on the kitchen table", but these changes see wealthy benefit substantially more than the rest of us.

The promised 2020 Tax Roll Back Guarantee, will, through a variety of tax changes, supposedly put \$2,020 on every

kitchen table by 2020. But these sorts of tax 'breaks' give the most to those who are already well-off, while doing little to help those who actually need it. While every dollar counts for low income people, they see a disproportionately smaller portion of the benefit when, if we want to reduce income inequality, they should be getting more. The Guarantee states that Manitobans will save \$1.78 billion, but what is saved is also lost: the province will have that much less to invest in services such as healthcare, education and fighting climate change. It makes more sense to say that by 2020, each Manitoban will lose access to public services worth \$2,020, and that loss will hit marginalized people harder.

The government plans to "direct youth in trouble with the law to appropriate community programs and services. . .". But their austerity measures have made it much more difficult for those community groups to help youth with the education and training they need to enter the labour market. Our schools and our front line social service agencies that come face-to-face with child poverty in Manitoba, continue to struggle with provincial retrenchment, and it still a mystery how this government will fund education after it removes the education portion of the property tax.

Similarly, agencies serving the homeless, those struggling with addictions, and

there is an alternative.

CCPA-MB
301 - 583 Ellice Ave.
Winnipeg, MB
R3B 1Z7

phone
(204) 927-3200

email
ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca

website
www.policyalternatives.ca/
manitoba

blog
www.policyfix.ca

twitter
@ccpamb

continued..

domestic violence, are struggling with increasing demand and funding cuts. When agencies can't support our most vulnerable, we shouldn't be surprised that some end up involved in crime, "gang life and disorder", and inevitably put pressure on the healthcare system. The words 'poverty' or 'income inequality' do not appear once in the speech, despite the fact that it is poverty that is driving instances of crime and addiction – words that do appear in abundance.

Public services more broadly are under attack. We can expect to see more Public Private Partnerships and sell off of assets, including Agricultural Crown Land. Given the importance of these lands to the prairie eco-system and local farmers, this sell off is concerning. Mandate letters going to post-secondary institutions could have a devastating effect on the humanities, social sciences and fine arts – areas of study fundamental to civil society and critical thinking. The coming new legislation to replace The Civil Service Act says it will include ideas from frontline service providers. After the disastrous top-down healthcare reforms so far, we can forgive the nurses and members of the civil service for wondering if they really will be consulted.

In addition to the cuts and privatization, the embracing of internal trade agreements that lower labour standards will further undermine good jobs and increase inequality. Certainly any economic growth that may arise from these agreements will not, as claimed, be shared equally by all. Similarly, the loss of Project Labour Agreements will make it harder for workers to train for decent jobs and to ensure that wages and safety standards are sufficient. The Throne Speech also undermines good jobs through additional public service reductions, despite worries that Manitoba Hydro's struggle to cope with October's big storm was in part from the loss of so many Hydro workers.

Finally, details about how the Conservatives will respond to the climate emergency are woefully sparse. Lack of

action, especially around electrifying our transportation sector, which should be the foundation of a just transition and addressing the climate crisis, is particularly frustrating.

The direction taken in the Throne Speech is fundamentally different from what we will see with the APB. But that isn't surprising: the APB team is actually sitting around the proverbial kitchen table, and there's no throne in sight.

Lynne Fernandez holds the Errol Black Chair in Labour Issues at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and is working on the 2020 Alternative Provincial Budget with community partners.

CCPA-MB
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Winnipeg, MB
R3B 1Z7

phone
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email
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References available upon request.

