Who says the Canadian Taxpayers Federation never praises Manitoba's NDP government?

Canadian Taxpayers Federation

Canadian Taxpayers Federation

Colin Craig <ccraig@taxpayer.com>

Re: CTF News Release - Business Tax to Fall on Wednesday

CTF- Colin Craig <mb.director@taxpayer.com>
To: ccraig@taxpayer.com

Tue, Jun 30, 2009 at 8:41 AM

·CANADIAN·TAXPAYERS·FEDERATION·
Canadian Taxpayers Federation News
for immediate release

Wednesday, June 30, 2009

Business Tax to Fall on Wednesday

- ***Good news - provincial business tax rate to fall from 13 percent to 12 percent***
- ***Going forward - Manitoba needs a tax competitiveness plan***

WINNIPEG: The Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF) praised the provincial government today for reducing the business tax rate from 13 percent to 12 percent, effective Wednesday, July 1, 2009. The reduction was announced in the 2007 budget and was reaffirmed in the March 2009 budget.

"Reducing the business tax from 13 percent to 12 percent will help improve Manitoba's competitiveness," said Manitoba director Colin Craig. "The reduction will allow businesses to reinvest more of their earnings into hiring additional employees, higher wages and expanded operations."

Craig noted that the Doer government has made good progress in reducing business taxes since taking office. The general business tax rate has been reduced from 17 percent to 12 percent since 1999 while the small business tax rate has been reduced from 9 percent to 1 percent.

"The Doer government acknowledged that taxes matter when it comes to attracting workers and businesses to Manitoba, but there is still a lot of work to do when it comes to school taxes, payroll taxes and personal income taxes," added Craig.

Going Forward

The CTF urged the provincial government to immediately develop long term plans to:

- Reduce personal income taxes

- Eliminate the job-killing payroll tax
- Eliminate school taxes
- Control spending

Province	$35,000 Income Tax Rate*	$70,000 Income Tax Rate*	Job-Killing Payroll Tax	School Taxes
Manitoba	*12.75%*	*17.40%*	*YES*	*High*
Saskatchewan	11.00%	13.00%	NO	High
Alberta	10.00%	10.00%	NO	Moderate
Ontario	6.05%	9.15%	YES	High
B.C.	5.06%	7.70%	NO	Low

Marginal tax rates at each income level

According to Statistics Canada, Manitoba lost 66,261 residents to lower-taxed B.C., Saskatchewan and Alberta between 2001-08." added Craig. "The fact that only 41,627 of their residents moved here tells us we need to become more competitive."

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Winnipeg Free Press - ONLINE EDITION

New tax cuts, credits take effect today

By: Bruce Owen

1/07/2009 9:00 AM | Comments: 2

Manitoba's corporation tax rate dropped to 12 per cent from 13 per cent starting today, a move that earned the Doer government rare praise from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

"They're making some good moves, but there is still a lot of work to be done," CTF-Manitoba director Colin Craig said Tuesday.

Craig said the province has to do more to develop a long-term planned to reduce additional taxes on business — the payroll tax, for example—and the personal tax load on Manitobans, such as education taxes.

"They've got to make taxes more competitive with other provinces," Craig said.

But the province counters that with the latest decrease, the corporation income tax rate has dropped 29 per cent overall since the NDP formed government a decade ago. The rate was to decline to 11 per cent next year, but was postponed in the 2009 budget. At the same time, Finance Minister Greg Selinger said in the 2009 budget the small business tax rate will drop to zero before the end of 2010, down from eight per cent in 1999.

Selinger said Tuesday despite hints the global economy is improving in some areas, there is little point at this stage to discuss tax cuts of any kind.

"Manitoba's economy in relative terms is still doing quite well," Selinger said. "As you know there has been lots of positive indicators, but doing quite well still means negative growth."

Selinger also said economic forecasts predict the recovery from the recession will take longer than first expected.

"I don't think we can expect a lot of growth revenues in the future," he said, adding consumer confidence and business investment are only expected to begin to pick up by the end of the year or early next year.

Craig said the recession doesn't prevent the province from developing a long-term plan to further reduce business taxes and cut personal income taxes.

He said Manitoba's high income tax rates—12.75 per cent for people who earn more than $35,000 and

Oct 20/08

Lumps and praise well deserved

Premier Doer took his fair share of lumps in the media during the past session at the legislature. They were well deserved as his government watered down the Balanced Budget Act, introduced a vote tax and passed unfriendly agriculture legislation. However, it is equally important to praise the government for the initiatives that it got right.

For starters, government conspiracy theorists like former *X-Files* character Fox Mulder would be particularly pleased with at least one of the Doer government's initiatives.

Confidential documents prepared for provincial cabinet meetings will no longer remain sealed for 30 years. Such documents can now see the light of day after "just" 20 years. While cynics will suggest the government made the move as a means to start releasing unflattering documents from the previous government's era (which coincidentally commenced 20 years ago in 1988), any step towards greater transparency is a positive one.

During public hearings for the legislation last spring, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF) pushed for a further reduction of the secrecy period to as close to zero as possible.

Another good initiative was the introduction of fixed election dates. The CTF has long recommended fixed election dates and is pleased to see that Manitoba has now joined the growing list of provincial governments that have brought predictability to their electoral processes. At the federal level, voters saw this past year how the prime minister's on-again-off-again election call kept everyone in limbo.

It is easy to imagine the standstill a bureaucracy goes into when there is uncertainty around the timing of an election.

Typically, the one who benefits from a flexible election call is the party in power. Booking ad space, securing campaign office locations and being able to avoid unfavourable news on the horizon are just a few advantages ruling parties enjoy when only they know when an election will be called. The premier did the right thing and took all this political manipulation out of the equation. Mark your calendars now, Manitobans will be heading to the polls on Oct. 4, 2011.

Perhaps most of all, the Doer government deserves praise for its "CentrePort" legislation. The legislation responds to calls from the business community for the designation of a large area of land around the airport for the development of an inland port. Further, the bill also created a corporation called "CentrePort" which will be led by business, government and labour representatives to help guide the planning and development of the zone.

Assuming the new "government corporation" prepares a good business plan before asking for any tax dollars, it should be able to steer clear of the "boondoggle" title and instead deliver jobs and growth for the provincial economy.

For these three legislative initiatives, the premier deserves praise.

Hopefully taxpayers will see even more legislation like this in the sessions to come.

Colin Craig is the provincial director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

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Province plans to freeze wages

Measure would help tackle expected $600-M budget deficit

e're asking everybody take a pause. We are difficult times and we ve to have realistic pectations'

Finance Minister
sann Wowchuk

By Bruce Owen

IT'S the Selinger government's version of the pause that refreshes.

But the NDP government's fiscal prescription has left a bad taste in the mouths of those who say the New Democrats have borrowed a page from the playbook of Gary Filmon's Tories to cut costs on the backs of civil servants.

Finance Minister Rosann Wowchuk announced Tuesday the province wants a two-year wage freeze for its employees and the province's nurses.

Wowchuk said that freeze will help the province recover from a forecast $600-million budget deficit. If the unions don't agree, Wowchuk warns, the government will have to resort to layoffs and perhaps even legislated days off without pay.

Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union president Peter Olfert said the province's largest public sector union wasn't buying into Wowchuk's gloom.

"If the government is worried about the deficit, they need to get the economy going," he said. "You can't just slay the deficit on public sector workers. You have to grow the economy."

Olfert said despite Wowchuk's warning, the union still plans to present proposals for wage increases for its members. The MGEU's contract expires March 26.

"We're asking everybody to take a pause," Wowchuk said. "We are in difficult times and we have to have realistic expectations."

She said the freeze will allow the province to maintain services and not see any layoffs, or bring in unpaid days off for workers in the same way Filmon's Progressive Conservatives did in the mid-1990s.

"Filmon Fridays" were created in 1993 under reduced-work-week legislation that gave provincial government workers 10 unpaid days off each year. In the first year, the days off were legislated, but for the next five years, they were negotiated into the contracts of unionized workers.

Wowchuk said public employees have to share the burden of tough economic times.

She also said cabinet ministers will forgo a $1,000 raise due to take effect in April as part of government belt-tightening.

Premier Greg Selinger is also looking at freezing the base pay of all legislature members, which is scheduled to jump in April to $85,564 from $83,722 under a cost-of-living formula.

Opposition Progressive Conservative Leader Hugh McFadyen said his party hasn't seen a proposal on an MLA pay freeze yet.

He said if the NDP really wanted to cut costs, it would nix controversial capital projects, like the new hydro line down the west side of the province in favour of a shorter east-side route.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation applauded Wowchuk's move.

"Private sector employees felt the pinch during the economic slowdown, public sector employees should too," CTF Prairie director Colin Craig said in a release. "The two-year wage freeze is something we recommended to the minister, so it's great to see her act on that recommendation."

Wowchuk said by freezing public sector salaries over two years, it will help the province in its five-year plan to get back in the black.

Health-care wages were about $3 billion in 2009 and civil servants' salaries were about $770 million, she said.

"Those are big costs," she said. "If we can contain those costs, maintain them where we are without having increases, then we can look at ensuring that we don't lay off people and maintain services.

"If we can get through these next two years that way, we should be in much better shape."

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'You can't just slay the deficit on public sector workers. You have to grow the economy'

— Peter Olfert,
MGEU president

Canadian Taxpayers Federation

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Commentary - We're With You Minister Wowchuk

Colin Craig--CTF Prairie Director <ccraig@taxpayer.com> Fri, Feb 19, 2010 at 9:50 AM
To: ccraig@taxpayer.com

Canadian Taxpayers Federation Let's Talk Taxes a weekly commentary

We're With You Minister Wowchuk

"Circulated to media across Manitoba."

February 19, 2010

By calling for a two-year public sector wage freeze, NDP Finance Minister Rosann Wowchuk has embarked on a politically challenging, but taxpayer-friendly mission. On this initiative taxpayers need to stand behind her.

When the Canadian Taxpayers Federation met with Minister Wowchuk in January to present our recommendations for the 2010 budget, introducing a two-year public sector wage freeze was one of our top recommendations. The measure would go a long way towards helping the province address its massive deficit. After all, government salaries make up a significant portion of total expenditures.

As government employee salaries have been increasing by leaps and bounds over the past decade, it's certainly justifiable to look at freezing, or even cutting pay levels to help the province balance the budget.

Doing so would recognize the pain of those who are footing the bill for the public sector salaries – employees in the private sector. Over the past two years, private sector employees have seen job losses, wage cuts and reduced shifts.

Big government unions like to talk about "solidarity," well now it's time for them to stand united with private sector employees and share the pinch of the economic slowdown. A mere wage freeze is the least public sector unions could do.

It certainly wouldn't be out of the ordinary. Consider that New Brunswick's Liberal government introduced a two-year wage freeze last year that affects everyone from their premier down to the employee who cleans his office.

Former Ontario NDP Premier Bob Rae introduced unpaid work days during the 1990s as did former Progressive Conservative Premier Gary Filmon.

It's not like the public service is starving for jobs either. According to the provincial government's civil service commission, the number of employees has ballooned from 13,752 in 2005 to 14,625 in 2009 – an increase of 873 positions.

On top of unparalleled job security enjoyed by public sector employees, many studies show that government employees not only earn more in wages, they also enjoy lucrative pension plans; something which has become non-existent in the private sector. According to Statistics Canada, as of 2008, only 21.3 per cent of private sector employees had workplace pension plans compared to 83.2 per cent in the public sector. Clearly the public sector is not hurting.

Minister Wowchuk has noted that the salaries of health care staff and other government employees cost taxpayers approximately $3.77 billion annually. Should those salaries and benefits grow by 3 per cent or more annually for the next two years (as they inevitably would) that would boost costs by $120 million and $230 million respectively. The savings that would come from freezing salaries would certainly help the government slay the deficit.

A decade of wild spending has finally caught up with the provincial government. They'll need to make cuts in a number of areas to slay the deficit, but when it comes to staff salaries, the Minister is on the right track. If she's sincere in doing so, it's up to us to stand behind her.

Colin Craig
Prairie Director

'Let's Talk Taxes' is a **free** commentary provided every two weeks to media outlets and opinion leaders by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF). The CTF is Canada's leading non-partisan citizens' advocacy group fighting for lower taxes, less waste and accountable government. Founded in 1990, the CTF has over 60,000 supporters and 7 offices across Canada. The CTF is funded by free-will, non tax-receiptable contributions.

A high-resolution, print quality photo of the author can be downloaded here.

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Winnipeg Free Press PRINTTHIS

Group pushes for gas tax accountability

Staff Writer

14/05/2009 9:47 AM | Comments: 0

WINNIPEG — The Canadian Taxpayers Federation wants you to know how much tax you're paying when you fill up your vehicle's gas tank.

In Manitoba, it's 31 cents on every dollar you spend at the pump. The national average is 37 cents on the dollar.

But just across the border in North Dakota, it's less than 19 per cent of the pump price, the CTF said today as it held its 11th annual "Gas Tax Honesty Day."

Part of the reason for Canada's high gas prices is the fact that the GST is applied on top of other taxes.

Eliminating the federal government's 'tax-on-a-tax' approach was one of Prime Minister Harper's commitments while in opposition, the taxpayers federation said.

"The provincial government tables a report each year that clearly shows it spends more on roads than it raises in gas taxes," said CTF Manitoba director Colin Craig.

"Ottawa should table the same. We drafted a Gas Tax Accountability Act for the federal government to pass that would require 100 per cent of gas tax revenues to be spent on roads," he said.

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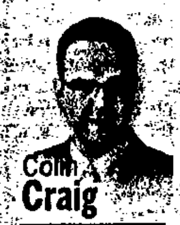
Find this article at:
http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/Group-pushes-for-gas-tax-accountability-44983222.html

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Step on the gas with our gas taxes

Since 1998, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF) has advocated that gas taxes be treated like a user fee and thus, the dollars raised from gas taxes should be spent on road construction and repair. If you support that notion, recent federal figures give cause for celebration.



Colin Craig

Consider the fact that in 1998, when the CTF began holding "Gas Tax Honesty Day," our annual gas tax awareness event, the federal government only spent 26% of fuel tax revenue on "infrastructure" projects. For 2009 that figure has ballooned to 146%.

Clearly, things have moved in the right direction.

Unfortunately, given the way federal expenditures are reported, it's difficult to know exactly how much progress has been made. You see, as a spending category, "infrastructure" represents more than just roads. For example, a couple years ago, fuel tax dollars were actually spent on bocce ball courts and a canoe museum which were also categorized as "infrastructure." Although it is difficult to say for certain that 100% of federal fuel tax dollars are being spent on roads this year, we've come a long way from where we were in 1998.

One thing is for certain, the 150,000 gas tax petition signatures that the CTF has delivered to Ottawa on the issue played a big part in shifting federal funding.

But going forward, there is more work to be done. To begin, the Harper government needs to take a page out of the Doer government's play book and pass a "Gas Tax Accountability Act."

In 2004, the Doer government passed such an act and now must publish annually both the amount collected in fuel taxes and the amount spent on road construction and repair. Looking at the last four years, the Doer government has averaged 122% — meaning they are spending even more on roads than they collect in fuel taxes. On this issue, the Doer gang deserves two thumbs up.

In addition to simply reporting how fuel taxes are raised and spent, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation's version of the "Gas Tax Accountability Act" goes one step further. If passed by the House of Commons, it would require the federal government to spend at least 100% of fuel tax revenue on roads. Further, the federal government's dirty little secret is that the GST is actually applied after other gas taxes are collected. It is in fact a "tax-on-a-tax." To rectify this problem, Prime Minister Harper should heed some advice he gave to former Prime Minister Paul Martin through a 2004 news release:

"The fastest and easiest way to give Canadians relief at the pump is for the federal government to stop charging GST on top of gasoline excise taxes. It's time to axe the tax on the tax." By reducing the GST from 7% to 5% and increasing roadway spending, Prime Minister Harper has taken us from a quarter of a tank to half a tank. Now all we need is for him to finish the job by passing a Gas Tax Accountability Act.

— Colin Craig is the Manitoba director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

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A hefty bonus for showing up

Who says governments never listen?

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF) recently discovered that your tax dollars had been used for years to give bonuses to employees at government-funded child care agencies for simply showing up for work. Through our whistle-blowing and government action these unjustifiable bonuses have been discontinued for 2009. After receiving a tip that both watches and bonus cheques were being handed out to employees at the Southeast Child and Family Services agency, the CTF investigated and learned that in fact, over $68,740 worth of bonus cheques and gifts were handed out between 2005 and 2007.

It seemed the bonus cheques had been distributed for years as a way of recognizing overtime put in by the agency's staff.

Unfortunately, overtime work wasn't recorded anywhere and the funds weren't based on performance measures. Further, child care workers that do the same work directly within the government weren't offered the same bonus structure.

While the CTF can support the notion of providing bonuses to government employees when an overall savings is delivered for taxpayers, such was not the case in this instance. When the CTF met with provincial Family Services Minister Gord Mackintosh, we learned that the Southeast agency discontinued the bonuses for 2008. However, as a result of the CTF stirring up this issue, the government discovered that the Peguis Child and Family Services agency and the Intertribal Child and Family Services agency had also been handing out bonuses for which there were no clear performance measures.

Thankfully Minister Mackintosh committed to stop the unjustifiable bonuses. In fact, this is the second time that Minister Mackintosh has taken action when the CTF brought a matter to his attention.

Last September, the CTF met with him to discuss a discovery that tax dollars were used to provide manicures, pedicures and tarot card readings to employees at a government-funded child care agency. Minister Mackintosh acted on the matter and directed the agency to repay the funds used inappropriately. Since that time, all of the tax dollars have been repaid.

Although the government made changes in 2003 that helped improve the accountability of these agencies (which are funded by both the federal and the provincial government), there have been other instances of tax dollars being wasted.

Few have forgotten the discovery in 2007 that the Cree Nation Child and Family Services Caring agency had spent $72,000 to take staff on a retreat to Niagara Falls and $30,000 to buy a van for the CEO. More recently, it was discovered that employees at the Anishinaabe Child and Family Services agency went to Reno, Nev., for a "professional development" conference this past April. It all adds up to a system that appears to need more checks and balances. At least these agencies know there's others watching how they spend taxpayer dollars.

— Colin Craig is the Manitoba director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

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Tax-on-tax tomfoolery needs to end

COLIN CRAIG

Hydro ratepayers across the province could be on the hook for $9 million if the City of Winnipeg wins a silly lawsuit against Manitoba Hydro.

Although the law may technically be on the city's side, it's a bad law, and, moreover, City Hall should realize there is only one taxpayer and drop the matter all together.

Central to the city's argument is provincial legislation which allows the City of Winnipeg to charge a tax on hydro bills.

According to the law, the city's 2.5% electricity tax should have been added on top of the GST, not just on top of the electricity charges over the past 20 years.

Sound complicated? Consider this example.

Right now if someone in Winnipeg uses $100 worth of electricity, Manitoba Hydro will add the city's 2.5% tax ($2.50), the province's 7% PST ($7.00) and the federal government's 5% GST ($5.00) together for a total bill of $114.50.

Clearly, each tax is applied against the $100 for the service.

However, the city discovered the law technically says the GST and the cost for electricity use should be combined together before the city's 2.5% tax is applied.

Thus, the $100 in charges and $5 of GST would be combined for $105 and then taxed with the city's 2.5% tax. Therefore the city's revenue would rise to $2.63 — a whopping 13 cents higher.

The difference between how the tax has been applied and how the city says it should have been applied adds up over the years.

According to the city, Manitoba Hydro (ultimately ratepayers) owes them $9 million.

It's a ludicrous claim, especially when one thinks back to the days of Winnipeg Hydro. Winnipeg Hydro of course was the utility that used to supply Winnipeg with electricity before the city sold it to Manitoba Hydro in 2002.

So how did the city calculate this tax when it owned Winnipeg Hydro? You guessed it — they didn't even do it the way they say it should be charged.

Charging taxes on top of other taxes is simply poor public policy, one that the Canadian Taxpayers Federation regularly speaks out against.

Charging taxes on top of other taxes is simply poor public policy.

In fact, for years we have spoken out against the federal government applying the GST on top of other gas excise taxes every time you fill up at the pumps.

Instead of discovering the mistake and going after Hydro for the money, someone at City Hall should have picked up the phone and advised the province to correct the legislation.

After all, it's not like Hydro has $9 million just lying around, they'll have to raise electricity rates on the same ratepayers city hall is supposed to be looking out for.

Rumours are flying that the province might simply change the legislation retroactively and cut the city's lawsuit off at the knees.

A big two thumbs up if they do.

On this issue, someone in government needs to be looking out for taxpayers.

— Colin Craig is the prairie director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

Canadian Taxpayers Federation

Colin Craig <ccraig@taxpayer.com>

CTF News Release - Doer Did It Right

CTF- Colin Craig <ccraig@taxpayer.com>
To: ccraig@taxpayer.com

Tue, Nov 25, 2008 at 4:02 PM

·CANADIAN·TAXPAYERS·FEDERATION·
Canadian Taxpayers Federation News for immediate release

Tuesday, November 25, 2008

Doer Did It Right

- *CTF Pleased Thompson's Tax Proposals Rejected & 1% Sales Tax All But Defeated*

WINNIPEG: The Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF) praised the provincial government today for its refusal to introduce new alcohol, land and restaurant taxes for municipalities.

"The Premier deserves a big pat on the back for refusing to give municipalities new taxing powers," said CTF Manitoba director Colin Craig "Manitobans pay enough in taxes. Creating a new tax during the current economic slowdown would be detrimental to families and the economy."

The CTF noted that there are plenty of initiatives that municipalities could pursue to reduce their costs and raise revenue through legitimate means. Some examples include:

Expenditure side:

- Partner for service delivery with non-profit organizations and the private sector;
- Bring salaries in line with the private sector;
- Develop P3's for capital projects;
- Increase usage of volunteers to reduce labour costs; and
- Focus on core services (i.e. the old saying – "pipes, pavement and policing").

Revenue side:

- Sell non-core assets (i.e. golf courses, convention centres);
- Sell surplus land (gain revenue from sale of the land & annual property taxes);
- Raise revenue through corporate sponsorships;
- Partner with the private sector to deliver services – i.e. coffee shops in public libraries (see University of Manitoba for effective partnership); and
- Convert service funding to user fees where appropriate (while not simply introducing cash grabs).

Craig also noted that on top of revenues raised through property taxes, municipalities will receive over $280 million in grants and tax sharing from the provincial government in 2008/09 alone.

"It is encouraging to see that the notion of a new 1% municipal sales tax has all but been rejected. If municipalities spent as much time figuring out ways to spend existing dollars more efficiently as they do asking for more dollars, we'd all be better off."

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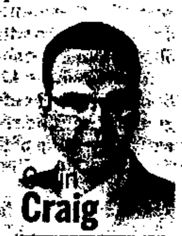
For more information, please contact Colin Craig at **982-2152** (W) or **227-5561** (C)

Doer's vision has no vision

The provincial government's recent throne speech and economic update deserve both beefs and bouquets. Let's start with the good news.

When faced with tough economic times, governments often get weak-kneed and delay or cancel planned tax relief. It's called taking the easy way out.



Ontario taxpayers saw that happen in 2002 when Conservative Premier Ernie Eves delayed previously announced personal and corporate income tax relief during their economic slow down.

Fortunately Manitoba's provincial government hasn't postponed previously announced tax relief. And for this, finance Minister Greg Selinger and Premier Doer deserve praise. Although their reductions to personal and corporate income tax rates are relatively minor, it is encouraging that they acknowledge it will have a positive effect on the economy.

Now for the bad news. Conspicuously absent was a long term vision to address the many challenges facing our province.

A prime example is the government's growing dependence on handouts from other provinces. According to the 2008 budget, 21% of the provincial government's revenues will come from other provinces. Include handouts from the federal government and Manitoba's total portion of revenue from other governments now sits at 36.7%. As it was just 28.2% in 1999, Manitoba's rate of dependency has increased more than any other province during that period.

If this province is to stand on its own two feet, it will have to develop an aggressive debt retirement strategy. Currently, $262 million of taxpayer dollars are wasted each year on debt servicing costs. Although this figure is down since the government took office in 1999, at the current pace, our debt won't be retired for another 50 years. The province's unsustainable spending rate also needs to be tackled. Between the 2007 and 2008 budgets, spending increased by 6.2%. The government will be quick to point out that our aging population is a major driver of health care spending. However, if you take health care costs out of the equation, overall spending still increased by 6%. That's more than double Manitoba's inflation rate.

If the government is looking for a place to start, here's one frivolous example. The throne speech announced a "Financial Literacy Initiative" — a program designed to teach Manitobans how to open up bank accounts. Do any banks or credit unions exist that wouldn't do that for free?

Finally, the province has yet to layout a long term plan to bring our taxes in line with other provinces. It's no secret that Ontario, Alberta, B.C. and now Saskatchewan have all left Manitoba in the dust. In fact, a recent increase to Saskatchewan's basic personal exemption by $4,000 has expanded our tax gap with that province. Saskatchewanians can now earn $12,945 tax-free, while Manitobans are taxed on any income over $8,034.

If Manitoba is ever going to become a "have" province, our provincial government needs to layout a long term vision for our province that includes an aggressive debt repayment schedule, a plan to bring our tax rates in line with others and a strategy for reducing spending. Too bad it's not what we got.

— Colin Craig is the Manitoba director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

Note: Titled submitted with article was "Where is the long term vision?"