

# Inaugural Address

## Response to the Speech from the Throne

James Teitsma

May 19, 2016

It's a great honour for me to rise today to speak for the first time in this Chamber. I want to congratulate you on your appointment as Deputy Speaker and also to Ms. Driedger for her appointment – or her election, rather, to Speaker – and not just because I got to move into her old office.

I believe that our Speaker has always been an excellent role model, especially for young women in our province like my two teenaged daughters, and I look forward to more results from her and the model that she has given to young women.

I have always had tremendous respect for this Chamber as well as admiration for the architecture that houses it. I distinctly remember my first trip to this building when I was just eight years old. I was standing on the Grand Staircase in awe of this building and of what it represents to Manitobans. Now, 37 years later when I stand on that same staircase, I am still in awe, and that level of respect is something that I work to instill in my five children, soon to be six children since my wife and I are expecting a baby due Canada Day, July 1st.

I'm very thankful for the support of my family, especially my wife, Joanne, and all of our children, throughout this entire election campaign, including many months, in fact, years, of preparation before that. And I'm grateful that I continue to have their support today as I stand in this House to serve as member of the Legislative Assembly.

My parents also taught me to recognize the legitimacy of governmental authority and the need to respect those who serve in public office. They taught me about my rights and my obligations as a citizen of this great country of Canada. I am so thankful that I and my family can live in this free country, a country where our rights and freedoms are enshrined in the Constitution and a country where our democratic processes have a proud and peaceful history. This is a country where citizens have long enjoyed freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, freedom of association and protections against discrimination, and I'm committed to ensuring that those freedoms are preserved

and protected, especially for those most vulnerable in our society. And, most of all, I want my children to be able to enjoy those same rights and freedoms that I have in the decades to come.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm humbled that I have been selected to serve as the member of this Legislative Assembly for the people of Radisson, and I want to thank them for entrusting me to represent them and their interests in this House. I also want to acknowledge my predecessor, Bidhu Jha, who served in this role for the past 13 years and has been supportive to me through the transition and helpful in getting me up to speed.

I also want to take a few moments to thank the many volunteers who worked hard on my campaign and also those who supported me financially. I often wonder: why would they be so willing to give so much of themselves so freely and so generously. And it's humbling to know that they're willing to do so simply in the hope that I, their elected representative, will serve well; that I, their elected representative, will prove worthy of the office to which I've been appointed. So that's something I strive for each and every day, to conduct myself in a way that honours the efforts of the volunteers and supporters who worked so hard to ensure I

was elected. And I want to encourage all the members of this House also to remember their volunteers and supporters each and every day.

I believe it was nearly three years ago that the honourable Minister of Crown Services (Mr. Schuler) took one of his many trips to his well of experience and insight for me to tell me that I should expect to work harder, to give more and to work longer hours than any volunteer in my campaign. And at the

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time I heartily agreed with his advice, but I can tell you that I didn't imagine it would be quite so hard to keep up to them. My volunteers have worked amazingly hard and they've shown me what can happen when you work together as a team. A team that has the same goals, the same vision, clear leadership and good organization can accomplish great things, and I look forward to doing that

with my team here in this House.

I can also tell you that my team ended up being bigger than I'd ever imagined it could be, as volunteers from across this province signed up to help our campaign in Radisson. One large group I want to recognize came from the honourable Minister of Finance's (Mr. Friesen) constituency, and I thank him for that. I intend to honour their efforts also with my service as an MLA.

And I also want to take a moment at this time to thank the staff of the Legislature and of the Clerk's office for their help in these past weeks. This was a historic election with a record number of new MLAs being elected to this House, and all this has translated to a record amount of transition-related work and training work for all the staff here at the Legislature. I believe they've responded wonderfully to this challenge with grace, humour, patience and professionalism, and I want to recognize them and appreciate them personally, and I encourage you all to do the same.

I also think it's appropriate to dwell a little bit longer on the historic nature of this recent election. Under the auspices of a first-past-the-post electoral system, achieving a majority of seats is not particularly rare, but doing so with a majority of votes is rare indeed, and that's what we have done. Perhaps Manitobans have taken a page out of the books of our immediate neighbours to the west in Saskatchewan. I hope so, and I hope that the Bombers can also learn from their example by bringing home a Grey Cup soon.

Speaking of 12-member teams, I also want to say that I'm tremendously proud of the 12 members of our Cabinet team. You have a tremendous responsibility but also a tremendous opportunity to steer Manitoba towards a better future, and I want you to know that you're well supported by your legislative assistants and by the backbench

and the rest of this House. We are ready and willing to step up and to help in whatever way we can.

Our first Prime Minister John A. Macdonald once said, if you give me better wood, I'd give you a better cabinet. Well, our Premier (Mr. Pallister), the honourable First Minister, has been given exactly that, and with this better Cabinet we will be able to build a better Manitoba.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's been almost three years since I first declared my interest and willingness to serve as the member of the Legislative Assembly for Radisson, and over those three years I've gained a deeper and deeper appreciation for what is the constituency of Radisson. It's possibly the

largest purely urban constituency in the province. Radisson's size also presents some unique challenges in dealing with other levels of government. I'm open to correction here, but I believe that Radisson is the only urban provincial constituency that is being served by two different federal MPs in Daniel Blaikie and Dan Vandal, two different city councillors with Matt Allard and Russ Wyatt, and two different school boards with the Louis Riel School Division and the River East Transcona School Division. So, in that sense, Radisson is sometimes best described as two halves of a whole.

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The southern part of the constituency includes all of Windsor Park and Southland Park north and east of the Mint respectively. The northern part of Radisson includes Mission Gardens and Waterside Estates, along with parts of Transcona and Lakeside Meadows. Not only that, but it is currently the home of a new large – the largest residential development within a 15-kilometre radius of Portage and Main.

Now, between these two halves lies a very large area with very few voters living in it, but it's that area that contains so much of what makes Radisson a special constituency.

There are places to work and places to shop. Radisson is home to the second largest retail and shopping district in the province after Polo Park, in the area around Kildonan Place.

Radisson is home to the largest volume rail yard in the province in Symington Yards, capable of handling 3,000 cars per day. Radisson has the largest conglomeration of automobile dealerships in the province, and although the honourable Minister of Health might tell you it's worth the trip to Steinbach, most Manitobans agree that it's just better to shop the Strip in Radisson.

What you might not know about Radisson is that it's also home to the largest concentration of recreational vehicle dealers in Manitoba, the largest Internet drug pharmacy in Canada and it's the home of the St. Boniface and Terracon industrial parks, many hotels, many more restaurants and countless small businesses.

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I'm confident that the strong fiscal plan that Manitoba's new government will put forward will be embraced by the people of Manitoba and by the people of Radisson. We're looking forward to reductions in taxes. We're looking forward to the elimination of unnecessary red tape. As outlined in the Throne Speech, this will help our businesses grow and prosper. We're also looking forward to the increased trade opportunities that will be

afforded us through the New West Partnership and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. And we're eager to engage with the Premier's Enterprise Team to pursue stronger economic growth in our province.

But what I love most about Radisson is its people. The constituency of Radisson is home to some of the most philanthropic people in our province: the honorary Lieutenant Colonel of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, Albert El Tassi, someone known to

many of you, I'm sure, has long been a resident of Radisson. Others like John and Bonnie Buhler or Larry and Tova Vickar have their businesses established in Radisson. These are people who have juxtaposed their success in business with a legacy of generosity and giving. That's why I was so pleased to hear that generosity acknowledged and embraced in the opening paragraphs of the Throne Speech.

As I walked and talked and knocked throughout Radisson, it became clear to me too that the people of Radisson are kind and caring and compassionate, and they have common sense. They recognize that the challenges our province is facing are significant and there are no quick fixes. A steady hand at the rudder is what is needed to coax us out of the turbulence and into smoother waters; to a government that's the right size, that's focused on providing services to Manitobans and that's fiscally responsible.

Changing gears for a moment, I can tell you that my heart breaks when I think about the brokenness and pain that our Child and Family Services workers encounter each and every day. I'm thankful that the Throne Speech made it clear that protecting

children is a top priority of this government and will be one of the first bills to be introduced. I personally share that priority because there's so much more that needs to be done. And government cannot do it alone. So I offer the honourable Minister of Families (Mr. Fielding) my support and my prayers, and encourage every member of this

house to do the same, to recognize the significance of the challenges that we face in this area and the need to work together as a team to solve them.

I've always believed that life should be valued from its very beginning to its end. And I'm encouraged by the commitments made in the Throne Speech and its initiatives for protecting and for educating our youth, for developing an improved mental health strategy and for caring for our seniors with the construction of additional personal-care-home beds. I believe that good government has a responsibility to all of its

citizens, but especially to those most vulnerable, including those living with a disability or those who are supporting a family member with a disability.

One question all of us as members of this House have had to answer is: Why did you run for office? Why do you want to be an

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MLA? And I was asked that question a lot of times, often by coworkers. At the time I would tell them that I've always been drawn to occupations where you're under-appreciated, work countless and thankless hours and are mocked and subjected to public ridicule on a regular basis. But all joking aside, what drives me, and I'm sure drives many of you as well, is a desire to serve, a desire to build a better province for the future and for our children.

Throughout my career in the information technology and financial planning worlds, I've made it my mission not to be promoted but to serve well. Perhaps predictably I was promoted anyways. But even in my senior management roles I made it my goal to lead by serving, because when individuals who make up the team are successful, then the team is also successful. And I've always believed that that's the only way the leader of the team can be successful as well, not at the expense of others, but by investing in them.

So I look forward to bringing my 20 years of management, financial planning and information technology experience, as well as my extensive volunteer work within my

church and community in the service of this government and of our province.

Our traditions and our history have given us this hallowed hall. And at times, this place may seem downright adversarial in nature.

I'm reminded of question period. But then I'd like to point you to what Václav Havel, the first democratically elected president of what was then Czechoslovakia said. He said, "the main enemy is not our political foes; the main enemy is our own bad traits: indifference to the common good, vanity, personal ambition, selfishness, rivalry. The main struggle needs to be fought on that field."

So today I want to challenge all the members of the PC caucus and all the members of this entire House to take up that struggle to be the kind of

leaders that Manitobans will love and respect.

Protect your core values, fight clean even if the other guy fights dirty, be honest, be truthful, be respectful of others no matter what your differences, work together as a team, be kind-hearted, be humble and be compassionate.

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The struggle needs to be fought on that field.

As I've grown in experience and hopefully with a little wisdom as well, I've found myself embracing more and more what might seem at the first glance to be conflicting ideas or at least highly contrasting ones. What I find is when you embrace that contrast is when you can achieve an elevated understanding of the true underlying meaning.

By way of an example, I take my life as a Christian. On the one hand, I know that I fall short every day of the ideals that I strive to live by. Not only that, but here we all are, just a few tiny specks of the billions of the tiny people on the infinitesimally small dot that is earth in a spectacularly enormous, amazing and complicated universe.

But, on the other hand, as a Christian, I believe that I'm individually, thoroughly and undeservedly loved by Jesus Christ. Now, that's a stark contrast and it's beyond my ability to comprehend, but the more I embrace it the more I understand what it means to be Christian. So in the same way, I want us to recognize that these kinds of contrasts are

not uncommon in our work as government either.

At least my fellow caucus members should have an idea of what it means to be both "progressive" and "conservative".

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Another example: we all need to work hard to defend the freedoms and rights of citizens to be able to believe and to say what we ourselves might strongly disagree with.

Some of these contrasting ideas were mentioned in the Throne Speech as well. Our government is to be humble, but it's also to be proud of what we achieve.

We are supposed to listen to Manitobans, but we're also supposed to keep them informed of what we're doing. We are to govern this province and we're to do so by serving its people.

And so I'm back at the beginning. How can I, how can you adequately thank your supporters and volunteers? What can I do in response to the trust that the people of Radisson have placed in me? What I will do is work hard for them. I will put their interests ahead of my own. I will maintain my integrity. I will deal honestly and I will serve. I will strive to have the strength, wisdom, courage, conviction and confidence to do what is right for Manitobans each and every day that I'm here.

Thank you!