

Has the Manitoba NDP been “Good” for Women?

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*A betrayal of women by The N.D.P. Government of Manitoba.*¹

This was the headline of a news wire released in May 2001 written by Dr. Henry Morgentaler as part of his on-going campaign to denounce the Manitoba government's refusal to publicly fund abortions provided at his private clinic in Winnipeg. To Dr. Morgentaler this was not merely bad government policy. Instead, the decision to not publicly fund his clinic was tantamount to a treasonist act on the part of a political party that is typically thought to be pro-choice.

But has Dr. Morgentaler gone too far? *Have* women in Manitoba been "betrayed"? This paper is an attempt to answer these questions within the overall research consideration of whether the presence of a New Democratic Party (NDP) government in Manitoba has been "good" for women.² This takes us to revisit much broader theoretical questions from two specific, yet inter-related perspectives. First, the degree to which social democratic political parties, in a post-Keynesian welfare state, have been responding to the demands of a neo-liberal policy context.³ Second, how well political parties represent the interests of women, since it is the NDP that has most often been associated with the kinds of policy developments and welfare state development advocated by women's groups. And, according to 1997 and 2000 federal election data, women most often selected the NDP as their voting preference.⁴ By all accounts then, the NDP is an important political party to women.

¹Dr. H. Morgentaler, "A betrayal of women by The N.D.P. Government," *Canada NewsWire*, May 2001. Available at: <http://www.newswire.ca/releases/May2001/10/c3407.html>

²Admittedly, I use the term "women" in a broad way with the understanding that women in Manitoba are quite diverse. Future elaborations of this research project intends to substantively address these differences, such as determining the extent to which child care and access to abortion are available/accessible to aboriginal and immigrant women.

³Byron Sheldrick, "Welfare Reform under Ontario's NDP: Social Democracy and Social Group Representation," *Studies in Political Economy* 55 (1998), 37-63; and Andrew Brian Tanguay, "Social Democracy on Trial: The Parti quebecois, the Ontario NDP, and the Search for a New Social Contract," in Jean-Pierre Beaud and Jean-Guy Prevost, eds., *La social-democratie en cette fin de siecle/Late Twentieth-Century Social Democracy* (Montreal: Presses de l'Universite du Quebec, 1995), 173-199.

⁴Jocelyne Praud, "Affirmative Action and Women's Representation in the Ontario New Democratic Party," in Manon Tremblay and Caroline Andrew, eds., *Women and Political*

In a recent article by Lisa Young, it is convincingly argued that the party system which emerged after the shock of the 1993 federal election has not been as accommodating to the representation and aspirations of women as was its predecessor, the so-called third party system.⁵ With Young's argument in mind, then, we are led to wonder to what extent this situation is playing out at the provincial level. This research query becomes even more salient when we consider that just prior to the provincial election in Manitoba in September 1999, some political observers were questioning whether the NDP, and probable future government, would be any different from the predecessor Progressive Conservative (PC) government. This position was one of many in a chorus of discussion assessing the future of the left, with some arguing that social democratic parties around the world, such as the NDP, had increasingly confronted a new political reality during the 1980s and 1990s that necessitated a "turn to the right, pragmatic" politics to capture and maintain electoral success.⁶

We know that some provincially elected social democratic governments proved to be anything but receptive to a progressive or women's policy agenda both in access to policy development and

Representation in Canada (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1998), 171-193; Lisa Young, "The Canadian Women's Movement and Political Parties, 1970-1993," in Manon Tremblay and Caroline Andrew, eds., *Women and Political Representation in Canada* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1998), 195-217. On the gender gap, see Elisabeth Gidengil, Andre Blais, Richard Nadeau, and Neil Nevitte, "Women to the Left? Gender Differences in Political Beliefs and Policy Preferences" in Manon Tremblay and Linda Trimble, eds., *Women and Electoral Politics in Canada* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2003), 140.

⁵Lisa Young, "Representation of Women in the New Canadian Party System," in William Cross, ed., *Political Parties, Representation, and Electoral Democracy in Canada* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2001), 181.

⁶See Peter Russell, ed., *The Future of Social Democracy: Views of Leaders from Around the World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); and John Richards, Robert D. Cairns and Larry Pratt, eds., *Social Democracy Without Illusions: Renewal of the Canadian Left* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991). See also Scott Edmonds, "Manitoba voters asked to buy new-look NDP," September 21, 1999. Available at: <http://www.canoe.ca/CNEWSManitobaElection/990921>

policy outcomes.⁷ Now that the NDP has been in government for just over 3 half years in Manitoba⁸, and the days of NDP governments in Ontario and British Columbia are behind us, the research agenda must turn its attention to how parties of the left have been grappling with this new political reality. This paper attempts to do just that by assessing the degree to which we can determine whether the Manitoba NDP has been “good” for women. To give substance and reality to this investigation, two policy sectors, child care and access to abortion, were analysed. Ultimately this paper argues that, in these two policy sectors, the Manitoba NDP policy program, framed around pragmatic idealism, has been better for the party than it has been for women.

To make this argument, this paper is divided into four parts. Part one outlines this study’s methodology and framework of analysis. Part two offers a brief overview of the Manitoba NDP to give context to the policy environment prior to the provincial election held in 1999. The third part of the paper briefly analyses the two policy sectors. The final section offers a number of explanations of the NDP’s responsiveness and non-responsiveness.

Part I - Methodology and Framework of Analysis

The methodology is case study which offers a focused investigation of the two policy areas under study here, the clear identification of the women’s groups advocating for policy change in these particular sectors, as well as their particular policy goals. A case study approach also affords the opportunity to highlight, in a very concrete way, dimensions of state-society relations between women and the Manitoba NDP. A qualitative analysis and approach to data collection were salient then, in order to fully capture key informant’s perspectives and interpretation of issues, as well as the language/meaning underpinning policy statements and other pertinent documents, all with a view to understanding elements of the policy determinants that have influenced the NDP’s response to women.

The framework of analysis was devised to operationalize the NDP’s response, or non-response, to women’s policy advocacy in order to assess what constitutes the NDP being “good” for

⁷For an assessment of the Ontario NDP see: Byron Sheldrick, “Welfare Reform under Ontario’s NDP,” 37-63; and Andrew Brian Tanguay, “Social Democracy on Trial,” 173-199.

⁸At the time of writing, the Manitoba government called a provincial election to be held June 3, 2003.

women. The framework has two dimensions. First, access to policy making, and second, policy outcomes. These two dimensions were selected because they are two important ways in which governments relate and respond to the demands of groups in civil society.

The interest representation system, which structures policy access, is crucial for women. In theory, a pluralistic system provides access points which provide an opportunity for women's groups to interject their experiences and perspectives into policy development to counter-act prevailing institutionalized ideas and policy responses that inhibit thinking and developing public policy with women in mind.⁹ In practice, we know that even with access women's groups often encounter significant challenges and many struggles in getting their voices heard since they must compete with policy interests articulated by other groups, as well as the priorities of the government. Policy access is, nonetheless, an indication of the extent to which a government is open to dialogue, and perhaps open to their ideas. The second dimension, policy outcomes, even more important to analyse in order to determine how public policy outcomes impact women. That said, through the application of a two dimensional framework we come to appreciate the elements of what is "good" for women. To the author's mind what women need in Manitoba is access to the policy development process in order to get the ear of government with the hope that policy outcomes have intended or hopeful outcomes. In the child care sector this would mean the development of a comprehensive, non-profit child care system affordable to any women (or parent). Regarding women's capacity to control their reproduction, what would be good for women would be increased access to abortion services publicly funded and administered in the primary health care system.

As once private issues now pushed onto the public agenda, child care and access to abortion were excellent selections for this study since they are policy areas that have long been integral to the promotion of women's equality.¹⁰ These issues continue to be important to many women, especially

⁹Sandra Burt, "The Several Worlds of Policy Analysis: Traditional Approaches and Feminist Critiques," in Sandra Burt and Lorraine Code, eds., *Changing Methods: Feminists Transforming Practice* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1995), 357-378.

¹⁰For a history of abortion debates at the federal level see Melissa Haussman, "Of Rights and Power: Canada's Federal Abortion Policy 1969-1991," in Dorothy McBride Stetson, ed., *Abortion Politics, Women's Movements, and the Democratic State: A Comparative Study of State*

when we consider that Manitoba has the second highest rate of child poverty in Canada¹¹ and that in 1999, 19.9 per cent¹² of Manitoba women aged 18 and over were considered poor. For aboriginal and visible minority women, poverty is even more acute. Canadian statistics indicate that in 1995, 42.7 per cent of aboriginal women lived in poverty.¹³ In Manitoba, aboriginal poverty rates, especially in Winnipeg's inner city, were incredibly high, with aboriginal child poverty twice that for all children. In fact, almost two-thirds of all aboriginal households in Winnipeg, 64.7 per cent, had incomes below the poverty line, while 31.8 per cent of visible minority women were impoverished.¹⁴ Even more disturbing, Manitoba has the highest high school drop-out rate among young women, attributed to a high teen pregnancy rate.¹⁵ Given the feminization of poverty in Manitoba, access to child care and safe, timely abortions is often a challenge or even prohibitive due to high fees, the young age of pregnant teens or rural/remote residency.

From an analytical perspective, child care and access to abortion are also good case studies for two reasons: First, the development of an accessible child care system and women's right to control

Feminism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 63-86. For a thorough analysis of child care advocacy see Susan Prentice, ed., *Changing Child Care: Five Decades of Child Care Advocacy & Policy in Canada* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2001).

¹¹Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, "Children, An Overlooked Investment," *Media Release*, November 22, 2002.

¹²Lissa Donner, *Women, Income and Health in Manitoba: An Overview and Ideas for Action*, (Winnipeg: Women's Health Clinic, July 2000), 1.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Darren Lezuski, Jim Silver and Errol Black, "High and Rising: The Growth of Poverty in Winnipeg," in Jim Silver, ed., *Solutions that Work: Fighting Poverty in Winnipeg* (Winnipeg & Halifax: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba and Fernwood Publishing, 2000), 39. Statistics for visible minority women taken from Lissa Donner, *Women, Income and Health in Manitoba*, 1.

¹⁵Statistics Canada data reported in Leah Janzen, "Manitoba has highest dropout rate for women," *Winnipeg Free Press*, January 24, 2002, A13.

their bodies and reproduction are stated policy goals of the federal NDP.¹⁶ In Manitoba, the NDP is committed to an accessible child care system, the abortion issue is more cloudy. It is argued here, however, that federal NDP policy objectives are perceived by many women in Manitoba, and certainly by others, as expected party policy at the provincial level as well. Second, there has been some measure of policy movement in Manitoba in the child care sector and very little movement in the access to abortion services. Through comparison we can pull apart elements and influences that are unique to each policy area. In both policy sectors, there has been active organizing and advocacy on the part of certain women's groups. In the child care sector, these groups include the Manitoba Child Care Association and the Child Care Coalition of Manitoba. In the abortion sector, the Women's Health Clinic has actively engaged in policy advocacy.

Part II - The Manitoba NDP, Election '99 and the Resultant Party System

In comparison to Canada's established political parties, the NDP is the political party, both at the federal and provincial level, which has most often been identified with being receptive to, and advocating on behalf of, democratic citizenship in conjunction with specific attention paid to the progressive women's equality agenda.¹⁷ This holds particularly for the Manitoba NDP given their history in the province as the party espousing a social democratic agenda in distinction from its enduring rival for the last several decades, the PC's. The Manitoba NDP, although never a radical social democratic party and a party often lead by pragmatic politicians¹⁸, nonetheless has historically, in the words of Alex Netherton:

¹⁶New Democrat Party of Canada, *Report of the Convention Resolutions Committee to the 20th Biennial Convention*, November 23-25, 2001, 40 and 55.

¹⁷Edward Broadbent, "Social Democracy or Liberalism in the New Millennium?" in *The Future of Social Democracy*, 73-93.

¹⁸NDP leader Ed Schreyer, Premier from 1969 to 1977, rejected the Waffle's left-nationalist program to the dismay of those who wanted the Manitoba NDP to go further in its social democratic agenda. See Alex Netherton, "Manitoba: Paradigm and Shift: A Sketch of Manitoba Politics," in Keith Brownsey and Michael Howlett, eds., *The Provincial State in Canada: Politics in the Provinces and Territories* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001), 218.

....stood for the use of the state to foster economic development, to promote social justice by means of securing the welfare state, to meet the legitimate social objectives of key social movements, and to ensure full employment.¹⁹

However, as Netherton further relates, into the twilight years of the Howard Pawley government, which in total spanned the period from 1981 to 1988, these objectives became increasingly difficult to realize, particularly given the emergence of a neo-conservative agenda under Brian Mulroney at the federal level which heralded a shift in the efficacy of the Keynesian welfare state across Canada. The NDP eventually fell into a “crisis of social democracy”²⁰ due to financial costs and political scandals associated with state investment in Crown Corporations. At the time, they were admonished by the media and the PCs as incompetent and wasteful due to a \$62 million loss in 1987 by the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation.²¹ Indeed, by 1988 the general purpose debt had risen 200 per cent. By the late 1980s, the NDP began implementing deficit reduction strategies and eventually fell in 1988 when their own backbenchers voted against a highly unpopular “restraint” budget. The NDP lost the 1988 election to Gary Filmon’s PC party.

After the election in 1988, the Filmon government implemented a two-prong economic strategy: first, deficit reduction and second, capitalizing on open export markets due to the Free Trade Agreement. The PC’s export-driven economic development strategy also included a low-wage policy, tax increases for business and tax reductions for individuals, all in an effort to transform Manitoba away from its historic characterization and place within the federation as the “Gateway to the West” into the

¹⁹Alex Netherton, “Manitoba: Paradigm and Shift,” 222.

²⁰This discussion and term “crisis of social democracy” taken from Alex Netherton, “Manitoba: Paradigm and Shift,” 222-223.

²¹Errol Black and Jim Silver, “In Defence of Public Ownership: The Case of Manitoba,” *Prairie Forum* 15, Spring 1990,127. The NDP had already confronted another Crown Corporation fiasco in 1986 when MTX employees (a subsidiary of Manitoba Telecom Service set up in Saudi Arabia) had paid thousands of dollars in bribes and discriminated against Jews and women in the hiring process.

“Gateway to the South” referring to a north-south orientation to trade.²² This economic development strategy lie at the heart of the PC’s neo-liberal policy agenda representing a dramatic shift away from Keynesianism to an economic policy distinguished by “...fiscal orthodoxy, attention to market competitiveness, deregulation, and privatization.”²³

The PC government lost the election in September 1999 in part because of a 1995 election vote-splitting scandal.²⁴ The PC’s also lost the election because Manitobans were looking for a change, juxtaposed to a measure of comfort on their part in knowing that the NDP would not be all that different from the PC’s.²⁵ Indeed, during the election, the leader of the NDP, Gary Doer, offered voters “clear and simple” pledges framed around five identifiable commitments, rather than grandiose policy positions typically associated with the NDP. Reflecting on this party’s 1999 electoral victory, Gary Doer put it this way:

...perhaps because of the persistent gap between promise and performance...this time we took a simpler approach, fearing that if we produced another 600-page document then we would almost certainly lose the election. In its place we produced five pledges and we made sure that each one, and this is perhaps a novel idea, could actually be implemented once we became the government.²⁶

²²Errol Black and Jim Silver, *A Flawed Economic Experiment: The New Political Economy of Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternative, June 1999), 4.

²³Alex Netherton, “Manitoba: Paradigm and Shift,” 225.

²⁴The vote-splitting scheme was uncovered three years after the 1995 election. An Inquiry was struck to investigate the matter and did so from November 1998 to January 1999. The scheme involved a number of profile PC party members bribing three aboriginal people to run as “independents” in ridings where the NDP had a foothold. Overview of the story available at: <http://www.michenerawards.ca>

²⁵The New Democratic Party won 31 (44.7% of popular vote) of the 57 seats in the legislature. The Progressive Conservative Party won 25 seats, while the Liberal Party won 1 seat.

²⁶Gary Doer, “Policy Challenges for the New Century: The Manitoba Perspective,” The 2000 Donald Gow Lecture, Queens University. Available at: <http://www.qsilver.queensu.ca/sps/calendar/gow>

The five pledges were: restoring health care (and ending “hallway medicine”); improving educational opportunities for young people; ensuring safer communities; keeping Manitoba Hydro publicly-owned; and finally, keeping in place Balanced Budget legislation passed by the previous administration.²⁷

Overall, the NDP swept into office having related to voters during the election that a fiscal conservative agenda would continue. And the NDP’s first Throne Speech, after being in Opposition for eleven years, largely reflected the new government’s desire to “hold the course” in order to ensure economic stability. As the newly-elected NDP saw it:

The people of Manitoba have made it clear that they expect their government to live within its means. This is not an unrealistic expectation, however. In the recent election, Manitobans voted for a set of commitments that is focused and achievable. They voted for improvements in the basic services that government provides and for sustainable tax reduction.²⁸

Indeed, after the NDP assumed office, the new Minister of Finance, Greg Selinger, announced that a private-sector management consultant had been hired to conduct an independent review of the province’s finances.²⁹ In their preliminary report to government, Deloitte and Touche indicated that over \$315 million in unbudgeted expenditures had been committed by the Filmon government prior to the change-over.³⁰ As a consequence, during the estimates review process in 2000-2001, departments were directed to draw up their budget proposals with the findings of the report in mind.

Following the 1999 election the resultant party system reveals a wounded PC party, a rejuvenated NDP and a Liberal Party that has become almost non-existent. Results from the last three provincial elections indicate that, between 1966 and 1999, the Liberal Party has only ever captured

²⁷Scott Edmonds, “Doer not hampered by hefty bag of promises,” September 22, 1999. Available at: <http://www.canoe.ca/CNEWSManitobaElection/990922>

²⁸Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, *Speech from the Throne*, Thursday, November 25, 1999. Available at: <http://www.gov.mb.ca/leg-asmb/hansard/1st-37th>

²⁹Manitoba Government, “Deloitte and Touche LLP to Help Conduct Manitoba’s Independent Financial Review,” *News Release*, November 8, 1999.

³⁰Manitoba Government, “Preliminary Response Outlined to Deloitte and Touche Report,” *News Release*, November 19, 1999.

over 10 seats in the Manitoba legislature, the high water mark being 20 seats after the 1988 election.³¹ The Liberal Party has also had three different leaders in the last 10 years - Sharon Carstairs, Paul Edwards and the current, Jon Gerrard. The PC Party has not fared any better with leadership. After the 1995 defeat, and due to the vote-splitting scandal, the party acclaimed a new leader in 2000, Stuart Murray. Mr. Murray, however, has consistently suffered from a low-profile, leading his party in December of 2001 to run a public relations campaign to make him known to Manitobans.³² Because of its fiscally pragmatic party platform and, in conjunction with the inability of the Liberal Party to make any electoral gains and the PC Party's woes, the NDP has been able to maneuver itself into the centre to capture any would-be Liberal Party voters, as well as disaffected conservative/PC voters, while also attempting to maintain its appeal to its traditional constituency. Arguably, part of the NDP's strategy to appeal to the centre and disassociated itself from being thought of as "yesterday's NDP", election financing reform was implemented in the Spring of 2000, the stated objective of which was to "...reinforce the democratic principle that citizens should exercise equal influence in the electoral process...".³³ This reform measure banned contributions from labour unions and corporations, limited contributions from individuals to \$3,000 a year, restricted donations from Manitoba residents only and limited Third Party spending during elections to \$5,000.

Now that we have a sense of the issues and outcomes of the 1999 election, how has NDP respond to women's policy demands? As the following analyses of child care and access to abortion relate, the financial health of the province, nor the unwillingness of the NDP to spend, were not necessarily the most important or lone determinants.

Part III - Child Care and Access to Abortion

Child care:

³¹Elections Manitoba. The Liberal Party captured 1 seat in 1980; 20 in 1988; 7 in 1990; 3 in 1995 and 1 in the last election held in 1999. Data available at: <http://www.elections.mb.ca>

³²Stuart Murray's picture - along with the slogan "Stuart Murray - A new leader for all Manitobans" - was displayed on 21 billboards across Manitoba in December 2001.

³³Becky Barrett, "Comments on Electoral Reform in Manitoba," The Future of Social Democracy in Canada, May 25 and 26, 2001. Available at: <http://www.misc.iecm.mcgill.ca> Becky Barrett is Labour Minister in the Manitoba government.

In 1995, while in Opposition, the NDP released a policy document outlining its vision of Manitoba. This document, entitled *Building Manitoba Together*, mentioned the party's intent to promote women's equality, referring specifically to pay equity. This section of the document also related the party's commitment, if elected, to develop a comprehensive, publicly funded, non-profit child care system, albeit within the context of building capacity for Manitoba families.³⁴ In May 2000, just eight months after the election, the NDP channeled a much needed \$9.1 million into the child care budget.³⁵

Following this budget decision, the government released what they called their child care vision paper in February 2001 prepared by the Child Day Care Regulatory Committee.³⁶ This Regulatory Committee, created in 1998 by the previous government, is made up of 24 representatives of the child care sector. The discussion paper envisioned a universal, accessible, affordable child care system built around six components: standards and quality care; funding; training and professionalism; governance; integrated service delivery; and public education. The vision paper was used to guide the NDP's public consultation, which elicited an enormous response³⁷, eventually forming the basis of the government's five-year child care plan. The *Five-Year Plan for Child Care (Five-Year Plan)*, again developed by the Regulatory Committee, was released in April 2002.³⁸ The *Five-Year Plan* is framed around three major elements: maintaining and improving quality; improving accessibility; and improving affordability.

³⁴The Manitoba New Democratic Party, *Rebuilding Manitoba Together*, March 1995, 45 and 46.

³⁵Manitoba Government, "9.1 million Increase in Funding for Manitoba's Child Care System," *News Release*, May 18, 2000.

³⁶Family Services and Housing, *A Vision for Child Care and Development in Manitoba*, February 2001. Available at: www.gov.mb.ca/fs/programs/cfs/visionpaper.html

³⁷The government received over 24,000 responses to the vision paper, which appears to have included signatures to a petition as well as letters from concerned groups and the attentive public. For a summary of the responses see Family Services and Housing, *Summary of the Public Response to A Vision for Child Care and Development in Manitoba*. Available at: <http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/programs/cfs/visionfindings.html>

³⁸Child and Family Services, *Manitoba's Five-Year Plan for Child Care*, April 2002. Available at: <http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/programs/cfs/fiveyearplan.html>

According to the Manitoba Child Care Association, since the initial cash outlay upon assuming office, the NDP has consistently increased funding over the years which has resulted in an concomitant increase in the number of spaces (see Appendix 1).³⁹ The Manitoba Child Care Association also considers the *Five-Year Plan* as a positive, substantive response from the NDP. According to Pat Wege, the Executive Director of the Manitoba Child Care Association, the NDP has proven itself to be a government that, not only has provided policy access to child care advocates and listens to what they have to say, they have also proven themselves with clear policy outcomes. As Pat Wege sees it, “...they just get it”, referring to the NDP’s understanding that child care is an important as both a women’s issue and an issue for parents, unlike the overall position of the previous government.⁴⁰ The Manitoba Child Care Association considers the province to be poised to implement a rather comprehensive child care system, the missing piece at this point to be the necessary federal funds to put the *Five-Year Plan* into reality. The recent \$900 million federal funding announcement, by way of the five-year multi-lateral agreement which builds on a September 2000 commitment to expand early childhood development programs,⁴¹ certainly goes part of the way in stepping child care up to the plate, but according to Pat Wege, “Canada was still a long way from a true national day-care program”.⁴²

The members of the Child Care Coalition of Manitoba agree with this sentiment.⁴³ However,

³⁹The Manitoba Child Care Association is the largest provincial child care association in Canada with 2,800 members. It is a non-profit organization incorporated in 1974. The group’s mission is “To advocate for a quality system of child care, to advance early childhood education as a profession, and to provide services to [its] members.” Manitoba Child Care Association, *Annual Report, 2001* and one-page leaflet.

⁴⁰Personal interview, Pat Wege, Executive Director, Manitoba Child Care Association, March 10, 2003.

⁴¹Human Resources Development Canada, “Supporting Canada’s Children and Families,” *News Release*, March 13, 2003. This new national program is outlined in the *Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care*.

⁴²David O’Brien, “Day care gets \$33-M boost: New national program will help fund another 5,000 spaces in province,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 14, 2003, A3.

⁴³The Child Care Coalition of Manitoba, established in 1994, is a coalition of approximately 40 groups and a number of individuals. The coalition’s mandate is to “...work toward a fully accessible, publicly-funded, non-profit system of comprehensive and high quality child care, with worthy wages and good working conditions for staff”. Child Care Coalition of Manitoba, *Annual Report, 2001*.

although they generally applaud the NDP for placing further funding to child care, the Child Care Coalition takes a much more critical perspective based upon three major concerns.⁴⁴ First, there needs to be more money directed to child care, a concern they share with the Manitoba Child Care Association. Second, a comprehensive, integrated and co-ordinated system of child care must be the articulated policy goal. Third, any child care system must be democratically administered and publicly accountable.

They are more critical because even with the cash infusion, child care in Manitoba is in crisis a situation not unlike many other jurisdictions across Canada. According to a recent report written by one of the founding members of the Child Care Coalition, there is licensed child care spaces for about one in ten children under the age of 12. Overall, it is estimated that 175,000 children do not have access.⁴⁵ In part, it comes down to a matter of not enough funding. To ensure a quality, comprehensive system, such as that developed by some European countries, Manitoba would need to commit and spend \$266.4 million a year on child care instead of the 2002-2003 actual budget of \$67.1 million.⁴⁶ Severe under-funding has not only impeded the building of a viable child care infrastructure, it has contributed to a severe lack of access to various communities across Manitoba. Since the vast majority of regulated spaces are located in Winnipeg, rural, northern, and aboriginal communities are consistently under-served,⁴⁷ as are special needs and the Franco-Manitoban communities. Between 1995 and 1998, 1 in 2 centres had to turn away a child with special needs due to lack of staffing, while Franco-Manitobans know well the lack of

⁴⁴Especially given that provincial funding for child care dropped 14 per cent, under the PC government, between 1989 and 1999. Susan Prentice, *A Decade of Decline: Regulated Child Care in Manitoba, 1989-1999* (Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba, June 2000), Summary.

⁴⁵Ibid., 3 and 1.

⁴⁶Susan Prentice, "Childcare: Manitobans Should Curb Their Enthusiasm," *Fast Facts* (Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba, March 20, 2003), 2.

⁴⁷Susan Prentice, *A Decade of Decline*, 14-17.

child care available in their first language.⁴⁸

Under-funding has also contributed to high child care fees. Users of day care centres generally pay annual fees of \$7,280 for infant care (\$28 per day), \$4,888 for preschool day care (\$18.80 per day) and \$3,170 for school-age child care (\$9.60 per day for school-days, \$18.80 for in-service and summer).⁴⁹ And fee subsidies do not cover the entire cost of day care for those who qualify. Since 1993, any centre or home child care service can surcharge a subsidy fee parent of up to \$2.40 per day.⁵⁰

The Child Care Coalition also advocates for the development of a comprehensive, integrated and co-ordinated system of child care. In their opinion, policy, program and institutional fragmentation has only served to exacerbate ills in child care service delivery on top of the problem of inaccessibility and high parental fees. In Manitoba, since early childhood education, child care and family support services are scattered across an array of government departments, “...there is little infrastructure to coordinate child care as a sector to enable policy development and analysis or service innovation” unlike the health or education sectors.⁵¹ One serious concern in this regard is the NDP’s attention and direction of funds to its Healthy Child Initiative which has streamlined funds to early childhood development programs and away from regulated child care.⁵² Indeed, Susan Prentice has related that only 20 per cent of last year’s funds received from the federal government through early childhood development initiative, mentioned above, was actually spent on regulated child care.⁵³

⁴⁸Child Care Coalition of Manitoba, *Blueprint for Action: A Five Year Plan for Manitoba Child Care Policy Redesign* (Winnipeg: Child Care Coalition of Manitoba, February 2001), 7.

⁴⁹Child Care Coalition of Manitoba, *Blueprint for Action*, 6.

⁵⁰Susan Prentice, *A Decade of Decline*, 8.

⁵¹Child Care Coalition of Manitoba, *Blueprint for Action*, 6.

⁵²The Healthy Child Initiative focuses on programs such as prenatal and early childhood nutrition programs, placing nurses in schools, adolescent pregnancy prevention and fetal alcohol syndrome. Manitoba Government, “Province Launches Healthy Child Initiative,” *News Release*, March 28, 2000.

⁵³Susan Prentice, “Childcare: Manitobans Should Curb their Enthusiasm,” 1.

Finally, the Child Care Coalition's criticisms of the state of child care in Manitoba do not end with policy or program outcomes, or even funding commitments. They are also concerned about the way in which child care policy has been developed. To address a perceived lack of transparency and accountability, they advocate the creation of a Child Care Policy Redesign Advisory Group to replace the existing Child Day Care Regulatory Review Committee.⁵⁴ This proposal emanates from a concern that child care policy outcomes, such as the *Five-Year Plan*, while a good start, are still unresponsive to the community due to the deficiencies outlined above. Moreover, since the Regulatory Review Committee's membership, deliberations and policy development proposals are confidential and protected under Freedom of Information, the Child Care Coalition prefers this committee either be disbanded or opened up to public scrutiny so as to implement "democratic administration" which to their mind, is expected of an NDP government.⁵⁵

Access to abortion:

In contrast to the child care sector, we are unable to track the policy trajectory of access to abortion as done with child care because there has not been any substantive policy response from the Manitoba government since the last election, nor are there any reported statistics which track actual spending on abortion procedures. Access to good information in this policy sector is a challenge, a situation recently noted by the Canadian Abortion Rights Action League.⁵⁶ By way of Statistics Canada, we do know that in 2000, there were 3,511 induced abortions in Manitoba, down from 3,653

⁵⁴Child Care Coalition of Manitoba, *Blueprint for Action*, 15. This new advisory group would ensure that parents and users of child care services would hold at least one-quarter of seats, early childhood educators would occupy one-quarter and the remaining 50 per cent would be held by child care advocates from various communities (aboriginal, ethno-cultural, labour, anti-poverty and social justice groups). Representatives from the Ministry of Family Services and Housing, Education and Health Child Manitoba would also be included.

⁵⁵Susan Prentice, *A Decade of Decline*, 23; Personal Interview, Cecile Cassista, Child Care Coalition of Manitoba, April 14, 2003.

⁵⁶Canadian Abortion Rights Action League, *Protecting Abortion Rights in Canada*, 2003, 48.

in 1999.⁵⁷

It is difficult to definitively account for the decline in the number of induced abortions since there are a number of variables at play. On the one hand, it could simply be due to women choosing not to have abortions, or it could be that there are not enough doctors to perform the procedure. On the other, it is also likely fewer abortions were performed because women have poor, even dismal, access in Manitoba. Induced abortions are only available at one hospital in Brandon and two hospitals in Winnipeg as well as the Morgentaler Clinic - for the entire province.⁵⁸ Services in The Pas and Thompson are no longer available. On top of this very limited access, hospital boards grant approval for induced abortions in their facilities (only by referral of a doctor), which are covered by medicare, while women at the private Morgentaler Clinic pay a fee of \$500 to \$550 - a contravention, it is maintained, of the *Canada Health Act*.⁵⁹ Timely, safe abortions, then, are unavailable to many women in Manitoba due to either the referral requirement, the fee at the Morgentaler Clinic, or because it is an extensive bureaucratic procedure that is often intimidating to women. Brenda Comaskey relates, for example, that in the hospital setting, the overall procedure usually involves three to four visits for the physical examination, lab work and then the abortion procedure.⁶⁰ As noted, women in rural and remote areas are further disadvantaged due to an overwhelming lack of any service.

Dr. Morgentaler challenged the PC government's refusal to pay for abortions at his clinic. In

⁵⁷Statistics Canada, "Induced Abortions by Province and Territory of Report," retrieved April 24, 2003. Available at: <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/health> Hospital-performed abortions accounted for the vast majority (3,140 versus 371).

⁵⁸Brenda Comaskey, "Compromised Choices: Accessing Abortion Services in Manitoba," *Womanly Times* (Winnipeg: Women's Health Clinic, Fall/Winter, 2001), 1. A recent report by the Canadian Abortion Rights Action League, however, reports that abortions are available at only two hospitals both located in Winnipeg. See Canadian Abortion Rights Action League, *Protecting Abortion Rights in Canada*, 36.

⁵⁹Ibid. Brenda Comaskey also relates that doctors have become fearful to perform abortions due to the threat of violence or death. In Winnipeg, Dr. Jack Fainman, a gynaecologist, was wounded when a shot was fired through a window of his home in November 1997.

⁶⁰Ibid.

March 1993, he won his case, but the government responded by enacting the *Health Services Insurance Amendment Act* which excluded payment of induced abortions in non-hospital settings.⁶¹ The NDP has maintained this policy position.

Two groups at the forefront advocating improved access to abortion services and the reproductive health of women have been the Coalition for Reproductive Choice and the Women's Health Clinic.⁶² According to Molly McCracken, in April 2000, the Coalition for Reproductive Choice began a series of meetings with the Health Minister, at which time the government indicated they would expand abortion service.⁶³ The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority was asked by Manitoba Health to develop policy options, out of which three were offered; increase service capacity in hospitals, fund the already established Morgentaler Clinic and finally, fund a community-based, publicly-funded clinic. The government apparently preferred the community-based option; an option that would be supported by the Women's Health Clinic. In the meantime, the province had entered into discussions with Dr. Morgentaler to buy the clinic in order to transform it to a public service much like the NDP was doing with the Pan Am Clinic at the time.⁶⁴ By April 2001, this option had been

⁶¹Canadian Abortion Rights Action League (CARAL), "Abortion in Canada Today: The Situation Province by Province," retrieved April 23, 2003. Available at: <http://www.caral.ca/facts/factsheets>

⁶²The Women's Health Clinic, established in 1981, is a feminist, community-based health centre which provides information and resources and offers a range of services such as guidance on health and wellness, advocacy and research on issues of importance to women's health, health education to the community and professional groups. Information available at: <http://www.womenshealthclinic.org> The Coalition for Reproductive Choice is a group of women in the community organized around the issue of women's reproductive health. This coalition has been active for over 20 years and was instrumental in the founding of the Women's Health Clinic. Women's Health Clinic, *Annual Reports, 2001 and 2002*.

⁶³Molly McCracken, "Manitoba Women Have Access to Abortions...As Long as They Have Time or Money," Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba, *Fast Facts*, September 23, 2002. The following discussion is taken from this source.

⁶⁴Manitoba Government, "Pan Am Clinic Doubles Surgeries," *News Release*, September 19, 2001. This clinic, once a private facility, now has surgical procedures, such as arthroscopic and reconstructive surgery of the knee, ankle, wrist, hand, elbow and shoulder, tendon repairs and facial repairs, redirected to it from the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg.

rejected by the government, and the Minister of Health, Dave Chomiak, eventually suspended talks with Dr. Morgentaler.

In August 2001, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, in consultation with the Women's Health Clinic, developed a plan to offer abortion services via a new community-based facility as a satellite to the Women's Health Clinic. The Women's Health Clinic has also advocated other measures to improve access, such as licensing midwives to perform abortion procedures (first trimester only) and making available to women over the counter, the morning after pill. According to the Women's Health Clinic, discussions with the government are still underway.⁶⁵

Part IV - Explanations for NDP Responsiveness and Non-Responsiveness

Has the Manitoba NDP been “good” for women? The initial answer to this question is not a simple yes or no. Policy access and policy outcomes in the sectors of child care and access to abortion services indicate a complex picture. On the one hand, the Manitoba Child Care Association, the Child Care Coalition and the Women's Health Clinic did have continuous access to the government officials. In strong terms, all of these groups related to the author that the NDP government is always willing to listen and dialogue on the issue of improving child care and access to abortion/reproductive health, quite unlike their relationship with the previous administration. However, while this study argues that access to the policy making process in some form is important, substantive policy outcomes speak louder. We are left asking then: What accounts for differences between the NDP's response to the child care sector as oppose to the reproductive health sector? Why was there more attention on the part of the NDP to child care?

The first, and perhaps most visible explanation has to do with the uniqueness of each policy sector. Child care is about taking care of our kids, tantamount to protecting and nurturing the next generation. Abortion is typically about terminating an unplanned or unwanted pregnancy. A moral divide exists within the views of Manitobans, much like it does with the general Canadian population. A Gallop Canada poll indicates that 41 per cent of women in Canada are opposed to abortion because they think it is morally wrong; while 59 per cent of those polled (between the ages of 18 to 29) thought

⁶⁵Personal Interview, Madeline Boscoe, Advocacy Co-ordinator, Women's Health Clinic, March 3, 2003.

it to be morally acceptable.⁶⁶ Questions of morality, however, do not figure significantly in public sentiment regarding whether one is in favour or oppose to child care. Indeed, polls indicate that Canadians consistently support the development of a national child care policy.⁶⁷ Moreover, if Canadians, and hence Manitobans, are opposed to the development of a national child care system it generally has to do with social conservative values, that is the desire to maintain the role of women as the care giver, coupled with the perceived expense of funding a national child care system on the backs of the average taxpayer. Further, there are economic benefits to improving child care services, since access to child care can potentially facilitate women's entrance into the labour market, and ease the double burden of women already in the labour force.⁶⁸ Child care then, meets other policy priorities of the government, while attending to the demands of the Manitoba labour movement. The moral divide between child care and access to abortion necessarily jettisons the issue of abortion into a far different political realm for the NDP, or for any government, who arguably seeks to reconcile or avoid controversial issues. Child care is simply more mainstream, less emotive and less divisive.

However, by all indications, the issue of child care has been too mainstream to the NDP. They have generally resisted funding and implementing, at least to the liking of the Child Care Coalition, a child care system that will substantively meet the needs of women, yet also meeting certain fiscal criteria (an express position of the NDP mentioned in the *Five- Year Plan*). Indeed, some have argued that inadequate funding for child care or the lack of any funds for a new publicly-funded abortion facility are because the NDP is an overly "cautious government".⁶⁹ Since the NDP assumed office, Manitoba's overall economic performance has exceeded the national average, and since then, the unemployment

⁶⁶Joanne Byfield, "A shaky 'social peace'," *The Report*, October 21, 2002. Available at: <http://report.ca/archive/report/20021021>

⁶⁷See poll results, dated January 27, 2003, on the Childcare Resource and Research Unit web page (as reported by the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada) indicating that 90 per cent of Canadians say the either strongly agree or agree with the statement "Canada should have a national co-ordinated child care plan." Available at: <http://www.childcarecanada.org/>

⁶⁸In 1999, women comprised 54.6 per cent of the labour force in Manitoba; 38.3 per cent of employed women were unionized. See Manitoba Women's Directorate, *Women in Manitoba: A Statistical Profile*, released November 13, 2002, 21 and 24

⁶⁹Molly McCracken, "Manitoba Women Have Access to Abortions...".

rate has consistently been one of the lowest amongst the provinces. Yet Manitoba economic fortunes are not secure. Since the last census, population growth was negligible, a worry for any government regarding the presence of a tax-paying, skilled work force.⁷⁰ Manitoba is also a have-not province which depends on federal transfer payments, typically accounting for 35 per cent of the province's revenue base. It is also has a small, open economy heavily tied to the American market, vulnerable as well to downturns in prices of agriculture products. According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba, growth in real GDP fell from 3.0 per cent in 2000 to 1.6 per cent in 2001, a consequence of the recession in the United States.⁷¹ As well, Manitoba crop receipts have fallen the last few years due to a steady decline in world wheat prices, although the live stock sector (e.g., hog production) has done relatively well.⁷²

In a nutshell, there is a measure of economic uncertainty in which the NDP must contend with under the constraints of a neo-liberal policy context that places a demand on the government to ensure the economy to remain competitive. The implications of this, however, are not good for women. On the one hand, the government responds only to a point so as not to appear to be mismanaging the economy. Or scarce resources are placed in health issue areas that serve a wider audience in Manitoba, such as improving cardiac care or increasing the number of available nurses and doctors. Improving women's reproductive health, including access to abortions, is lost amongst this crowded policy table. On the other, Manitoba's precarious economic position is used as a blame avoidance mechanism, evidenced by the Premier's response to the Coalition for Reproductive Choice in a February 2002 meeting wherein Gary Doer informed the coalition that spending to enhance abortion services could not be undertaken at that time due to the federal government's overpayment of transfer payments to the province.⁷³ The overpayment issue has now been resolved, with little subsequent

⁷⁰Manitoba's population grew by just +0.5 per cent according to data comparing figures from the 1996 and 2001 census. Jane Armstrong, "Canada is 30 million, but will that last?", *The Globe and Mail*, March 13, 2002. Available at: <http://www.globeandmail.ca>

⁷¹Paul Phillips, *State of the Manitoba Economy: Report, 2001-2002* (Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba, 2002), 1.

⁷²Ibid., 5.

⁷³Molly McCracken, "Manitoba Women Have Access to Abortions...".

movement on the part of the NDP.

Yet, how do we account for the apparent strong concern on the part of the NDP regarding the plight of women who do not have access to a child care space or a timely abortion? An insight to this apparent “want to, but...” approach has to do with the NDP’s attempt to legitimately implement a policy and political program articulated and referred to as pragmatic idealism by the Premier and leader of the Manitoba NDP, Gary Doer. To his mind, pragmatic idealism is a political agenda that works for Manitobans. It does so because it is a political agenda and direction that implements a set of concrete policies that directly affects peoples lives, such as ending so-called “hallway medicine”, while at the same time giving Manitobans a political party to vote for rather than merely voting against a right-wing alternative.⁷⁴

And pragmatic idealism certainly fits this government’s balanced, cautious approach. On the one hand the NDP has taken on some of the policy ideas and prescriptions that mirror a centre or slightly to the right political party, measures that includes implementing tax reductions and maintaining balanced budget legislation - and spending only so far - arguably due to the exigencies of the province’s economic reality. On the other hand, there is a real sense in which this government is reaching out to women. Yet, in many respects, it mirrors the politics of the Third Way, which according to the work of Angela McRobbie, “...envisages a politics for women without feminism” one of the intents of which is to make the political party, here New Labour in Britain, more attractive to more women by distancing itself from the old battles lines of left versus right politics.⁷⁵ Whereas the Third Way is a politic that speaks to women in an attempt to capture the ordinary “floating woman voter”, in Manitoba pragmatic idealism is well suited to do just that, as well as capture the floating or wavering Progressive Conservative voter. The NDP’s policy response to women then, is about much more than the financial health of the province or the willingness to spend. Indeed, in preparation for the next election, there are indications that the NDP has been working hard to capture a number of historically-held PC ridings in Winnipeg, as well as a few in rural areas such as Gimli.⁷⁶

⁷⁴Helen Fallding and Paul Samyn, “Doer offers up recipe for NDP success,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, November 24, 2001, A4.

⁷⁵Angela McRobbie, “Feminism and the Third Way,” *Feminist Review* 64, Spring 2000, 99.

⁷⁶Dan Lett, “NDP’s support near record levels,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 13, 2003, A3.

However, as Angela McRobbie further argues, a political party's successful distancing from feminism, or the women's equality agenda in this case, is not so easily done. In the wake are those traditional Manitoba NDP voters who will be wholly dissatisfied with a watered-down social democratic agenda, perhaps leading some to view the NDP's timid response as a "betrayal". With respect to child care, although the language of betrayal was not used, disappointment was certainly evident. We saw this with the different perspectives between the Manitoba Child Care Association and the Child Care Coalition. The former believes the NDP has substantively responded to women, the latter is much more critical (and feminist). Has the Child Care Coalition expected too much from the NDP? Will the Women's Health Clinic also be disappointed? These and other women's groups advancing a progressive women's equality agenda may well have to contend with a policy context that ultimately suits the NDP. One need only remind themselves that the NDP, either in Manitoba or at the federal level, has long been a party of muted social democracy, accepting the need for balanced budgets, tax reductions to individuals to stimulate the economy, as well as governments that "work" to ensure "better capitalism".⁷⁷ These policy stances have been articulated before by the NDP so as to expand their appeal and hence electoral success.

In an seemingly entrenched neo-liberal policy context, however, the NDP reflects the desires and policy program of the modern left, a position according to Ingvar Carlsson, former Prime Minister of Sweden, that is "...more trustful of the individual's own potential, but also acutely aware of how this potential can be enhanced and developed by means of public policy."⁷⁸ And "Today's NDP" - the party's own self-description - speaks to the party's commitment to economic equality of individuals - which can be facilitated, albeit not guaranteed, by child care available to *both* women and men as working parents/taxpayers. However, this type of policy response in the child care sector, that is, a one without enough monies targeted or developed in an integrated fashion for effective implementation, on top of the lack of any policy attention to abortion, does not attend to promoting women's equality. In many respects, the NDP seem to be striving to constitute itself as a centre-left "liberal democratic" political party filling the gap of an almost non-existent Liberal Party in Manitoba (while also meeting the

⁷⁷M. Janine Brodie and Jane Jenson, *Crisis, Challenge & Change: Party & Class in Canada* (Toronto: Methuen, 1980), 287, 289.

⁷⁸Ingvar Carlsson, "A Second Century of Social Democracy," in *The Future of Social Democracy*, 36-37.

needs of fiscal conservatives in the province). The question remains, however, how well the NDP will be able to balance this dual role - promoter of individual responsibility and residual social policy response, while also being an apparent defender of women's equality. By all indications, the NDP will likely win the next election precisely because of the way they have governed - policy with women in mind, but not necessarily women's equality. In this respect then, pragmatic idealism has been good to the NDP.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to explain the responsiveness and/or non-responsiveness of the Manitoba NDP in order to discern whether their policy programs have been good for women. In the two policy sectors analysed, child care and access to publicly-funded abortion services, the NDP has fallen short of meeting the needs of many Manitoban women. While policy access was available, policy outcomes were not forthcoming, except for the increases in funding to child care and the development of a five year policy strategy that still does not meet the needs of child care users.

The overall picture would certainly change if other policy areas were considered. For example, the Manitoba NDP has responded to women in other policy areas. They recently increased the minimum wage, they restored the National Child Benefit for families on social assistance with children 11 years old and under, and college and university tuition fees were reduced by 10 per cent and frozen at that level for three years. However, given an overwhelming lack of child care spaces for many women and children in the province, and the government's hesitancy to act on the abortion front, juxtaposed to the feminization of poverty in the province, women are not all that much better off under the NDP government than they were under the previous PC administration.

Appendix 1

Child Care Facts & Figures
Manitoba

Provincial budget for child care:

<u>97-98</u>	<u>98-99</u>	<u>99-00</u>	<u>00-01</u>	<u>01-02</u>	<u>02-03*</u>	<u>03-04*</u>
\$43.0	\$48.3	\$53.7	\$62.8	\$67.4	\$69.9	\$76

Growth or decline in centres, spaces & subsidies:

	<u>Jan/99</u>	<u>Jan/00</u>	<u>Jan/01</u>	<u>Jan/02</u>
# of child care centres	520	526	537	549

# of family child care homes	<u>536</u>	<u>546</u>	<u>572</u>	<u>584</u>
Total	<u>1,056</u>	<u>1,072</u>	<u>1,109</u>	<u>1,133</u>
Total centre spaces	17,678	18,199	18,908	19,857
Family care spaces	<u>3,565</u>	<u>3,693</u>	<u>3,926</u>	<u>4,012</u>
Total licensed spaces	<u>21,243</u>	<u>21,892</u>	<u>22,834</u>	<u>23,869</u>
Average % of spaces used by subsidized families	9,950 (44%)	10,450 (48%)	10,950 (47%)	10,770 (45%)

Source: Manitoba Child Care Association, March 2003 (Reprinted with permission.) * Budget figures reflect the recent federal funding announcement of March 14, 2003 which will transfer \$33 million to Manitoba.

Flanked by mothers and other women at a campaign event, Manitoba NDP Leader Wab Kinew promised Thursday to provide menstrual products in all schools for free if New Democrats are voted into power next month. "A strong health-care system also means investing in young women and girls," said NDP candidate for Wolseley Lisa Naylor, who was at the announcement and cited a statistic that one in seven Canadian girls have missed school because of their period. "That will create good jobs for those midwives here in the province but importantly, it will help to meet the needs of new moms and expecting moms here in the province," he said. Manitoba has been short midwives for many years including when the NDP was in power before the Tories were elected in 2016. While Greg Selinger has taken responsibility for his party's 'inaction' on incidents of alleged sexual misconduct while he was premier, he won't be stepping down. WATCH: Former NDP leader Greg Selinger offered an apology Tuesday to women who have come forward with allegations of sexual misconduct by former NDP MLA Stan Struthers. comments Leave a comment. facebook Share this item on Facebook. 'Our people have their voice,' says Manitoba NDP MLA Nahanni Fontaine. Brian Pallister's Tories captured 40 of 57 Manitoba seats, the party's best result ever and the biggest provincial win in more than a century—a decisive mandate for lower-cost, leaner and business-friendly government. Meanwhile, amid the decimation of the NDP was something significant and also unprecedented. The cries for an inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls reached peak volume after Tina Fontaine's murder in Winnipeg in 2014. And the capital city—with Canada's largest urban Indigenous community—continues to tackle the sting of systemic racism, as the city's first Metis mayor, Brian Bowman, declared 2016 a year of reconciliation.