



Speech from the Throne 2010

Delivered on the Occasion of the Opening of

The Fourth Session of
the Twenty Sixth Legislature
Province of Saskatchewan

Wednesday, October 27, 2010

The Honourable Dr. Gordon L. Barnhart
Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan

THE NEW ROAD

MR. SPEAKER, MEMBERS OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY,
HONOURED GUESTS,
PEOPLE OF SASKATCHEWAN:

Welcome to the opening of the Fourth Session of the Twenty Sixth Legislature.

The poet Robert Frost ends his most famous poem with these lines:

***Two roads diverged in the wood and I,
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference;***

Today, in the new Saskatchewan, we are on the road less travelled.

It is a new road for our province – and it has made all the difference.

This new road is marked by strong and continued growth.

Our population hit an all-time high of 1,045,622 people, 16,498 more than last year—the largest year-over-year increase since 1953.

A recent survey shows Saskatchewan business owners are some of the most optimistic in Canada.

According to the most recent Financial Post/CFIB rankings, Saskatchewan has three of Canada's top ten entrepreneurial cities—Lloydminster, Saskatoon and Prince Albert.

Saskatchewan recently set a record for the most people working in our province.

There are now 6,300 more people working in our province than one year ago.

Chartered banks are predicting nation-leading growth for Saskatchewan.

And the benefits of that growth are being widely distributed.

For the first time ever, wage rates in our province are rising above the national average, with a percentage increase that is third highest in Canada.

However, this growth is not an end in itself.

Growth simply marks the way to a better quality of life for all Saskatchewan people.

On the new road, we don't just talk about a new Children's Hospital for Saskatchewan.

We fund and are beginning to build a new Children's Hospital for Saskatchewan.

On the old road, there were no targets set to tackle a serious nursing shortage.

On the new road, the target of 800 was not only set, it now has been surpassed.

On the new road, we also find unique and innovative solutions to reduce surgical wait times.

In last year's throne speech, our government set another ambitious target to reduce surgical wait times to no more than three months, within four years.

My government is already beginning to make significant progress.

In Saskatoon for example, the number of patients waiting more than a year for hip and knee procedures has dropped 71 per cent in the past year.

My government will continue to make further investments working towards our surgical wait times goal.

On the new road, we are doing more to help those in need.

Services are now underway or in development for 308 individuals, reducing the community living waiting list.

Since the last Speech From the Throne, 161 affordable housing units have been built or have been rejuvenated.

Over the same period, 175 housing units for persons with intellectual disabilities have been completed or started.

The new road means, quite literally, new roads.

Efforts to improve and repair Saskatchewan's long-neglected highways continue.

Work on 1,129 more kilometers of highways was tendered in the past year.

An additional 793 kilometers of maintenance and safety improvements were completed by the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure as of the end of this summer.

The Global Transportation Hub is also emerging as a major economic force in our province.

This project, driven by private sector investment and public sector infrastructure, is already hiring hundreds of new workers, with more jobs to come.

In recognition of the need for everyone to have the opportunity to participate in the workforce, my government has improved childcare.

Since November of 2007, funding has been allocated for more than 2,900 new licensed childcare spaces.

By the end of March next year, the number of childcare spaces in Saskatchewan will have increased by more than 30 per cent.

Our workforce is also being bolstered by bright young minds that have decided to stay right here in Saskatchewan, because of initiatives like the Graduate Retention Program.

This trend will be enhanced in the coming months by the addition of a new Scholarship Fund.

This year, about ten thousand new immigrants are also calling Saskatchewan their home.

These families will help increase our workforce while creating a brighter, more dynamic and diverse province of the future.

My government has been more responsive to Saskatchewan farmers and farm families.

This year will be remembered by many farm families as the year Mother Nature conspired to create conditions that were virtually impossible for many.

My government acted quickly and significantly in partnership with our federal counterparts to ease this pain.

The result was \$360 million made available to help those hit by flooded croplands.

My government is also providing support to flooded areas through Crop Insurance, AgriStability and Agri-Invest.

Crop Insurance alone has already paid out more than one quarter of a billion dollars to producers this year, with many more post harvest claims soon to be processed.

It's estimated that this year's agriculture budget could be the largest in Saskatchewan history.

The next decade will see a significant and meaningful commitment to rehabilitating Saskatchewan's irrigation system.

This is an investment in our future.

More than \$30 million will be committed over the next ten years to restore and repair irrigation infrastructure in the Lake Diefenbaker area.

This will include more than \$1 million this year for repair of the M1 canal in Central Saskatchewan, which provides water for 55,000 acres of irrigation, eight communities, three potash mines and 26 domestic users.

Not only are Saskatchewan farm families getting more, they are paying less as a result of implementation of Phase I of an historic education property tax reduction plan.

That plan means farmers and ranchers no longer have to pay a disproportionate share of education property taxes.

In addition, rural and urban dwellers now benefit from a more effective and nimble government response in times of natural disaster.

My government would like to extend its thanks to the many local volunteers and municipal officials who worked tirelessly

this past summer under very difficult conditions and made suggestions to improve disaster programs.

My government is investing significantly in a new public safety telecommunications network that will ensure communities can keep in touch during emergencies.

This new state-of-the-art system will be in place by January of next year.

Saskatchewan streets will be safer with the addition of new police officers.

By the end of this fiscal year, a total of 90 new officers will be on the streets, with money for 30 more to be included in the next budget.

The fight against organized crime and gangs will also be expanding to adult correctional centres.

My government will introduce legislation authorizing the monitoring of telephone conversations by inmates in correctional centres.

All of these initiatives have taken place against the backdrop of lower government debt—meaning current prosperity is being shared with future generations.

Government debt is now \$4.1 billion, compared to \$6.8 billion when my government took office.

In this session, my government will also introduce a regulatory accountability initiative, designed to cut red tape for Saskatchewan businesses.

There will be a renewed focus on citizen-centred services, with people getting what they need from their government, in a way that is useful to them.

In addition to tax cuts and lower government spending, life remains affordable in Saskatchewan.

Average wages paid to workers in our province are up by five per cent compared to a year ago, well above the rate of inflation.

Utility costs remain among the lowest in Canada.

In fact, Saskatchewan families will benefit from a seven per cent decrease for the average residential natural gas customer, effective November 1st.

Since the fall of 2007, when Saskatchewan voters bestowed upon my government its first mandate, more than one hundred campaign promises have been kept.

A few promises that remain outstanding will be completed during this session.

In the coming year, Saskatchewan's new road will take us to the establishment of a revenue sharing formula with our municipal partners, based on one full percentage point of the provincial sales tax.

This will represent the highest level of operational support ever provided to municipalities.

A further promise to continue reducing the amount paid in education property taxes will also be met.

This means the education portion of property tax will have dropped by an average of 20 per cent since 2008.

For agricultural land, that tax bill will drop by an average of 80 per cent.

This is a substantial improvement and a real accomplishment.

In health care, my government is beginning to plan for a significant expansion of emergency medical services in cooperation with the STARS (Shock Trauma Air Rescue Service) program in Alberta.

This helicopter-based system would supplement existing air ambulance and ground ambulance services.

When acute trauma incidents occur, time is of the essence.

A new helicopter EMS system like STARS could be the difference between life and death.

The number of registered nursing students being educated in our province is also increasing.

A total of 130 seats have already been added, with an additional 170 seats on the way.

Efforts to increase the number of physicians across Saskatchewan also continue through the establishment of Saskatchewan's physician recruitment agency.

However, efforts to assure every Saskatchewan resident has access to a qualified physician regardless of where they live will go even further.

My government is in the process of implementing a realistic, made-in-Saskatchewan assessment process for internationally trained medical graduates.

And to further ensure the needs and rights of patients remain paramount, my government will fulfill a promise to create a health ombudsman within the office of the current provincial ombudsman.

Work will continue on the re-establishment of a dedicated addictions agency and the creation of an additional 100 long-term addictions recovery spaces in the province.

As we travel down Saskatchewan's new road, we must make every effort to ensure we stand shoulder to shoulder with First Nations and Métis.

This is why my government is committed to improving educational outcomes for our First Nations and Métis students.

The education of these students is a crucial precursor to their full participation in the labour market, and in Saskatchewan's future prosperity.

This is why several of my government's ministries are working collaboratively with First Nations and Métis leaders.

The goal is simple and profound: create a strategy best suited to the needs of this important group of students.

The initial focus will be on early learners.

Saskatchewan's new road also includes a demonstrated commitment to pre-kindergarten programs for vulnerable three and four year-olds across our province.

Since coming into office, my government has added an additional 75 such programs, serving 3,680 children.

This represents an overall increase of 45 per cent in the number of pre-kindergarten programs offered, since 2007.

First Nations and Métis partners are also part of my government's new and innovative approach to development of our northern forests under a new forestry management agreement.

This new approach sees industry partners fully cooperating with these groups, to manage the forest in an economic and sustainable manner.

In the words of Montreal Lake Cree Nation Chief Roger Bird:

"We would like to thank the Minister ... for making a great move to include First Nations in this endeavor, and we now have the task and challenge to create a better future for our young people in the forestry sector."

My government is also committed to working with local school boards to enhance business literacy, entrepreneurship and career education.

Not everyone on Saskatchewan's new road starts at the same place.

Some need a helping hand.

Others need continued support.

Upon entering office, my government addressed a long-standing concern by doubling benefits provided to seniors.

These benefits had remained unchanged for over a decade.

Yet another challenge was an infrastructure deficit in long-term care.

New facilities are much needed and some existing facilities are in dire need of capital improvements and repairs.

My government is addressing these issues through extensive community consultations and detailed planning plus significant financial support for the needed engineering, architectural and design work.

However, the innovation goes further.

My government is committed to pursue innovative funding models to address the shortage of long term care beds through partnerships with reputable third party agencies.

At least one of these new, innovative projects is underway right now in Saskatoon, with more to follow.

Work also continues on providing home safety audits for low-income seniors across our province.

From the Great Sand Hills in the southwest to our pristine northern boreal forest lakes, Saskatchewan's landscape is comprised of many unique and irreplaceable features.

These features must be protected for the enjoyment of future generations.

This is why my government will be introducing measures designed specifically to protect these beautiful regions of our province.

My government is also demonstrating its commitment to sustainability through support of expanded wind power capacity.

That capacity will double between now and 2015 to a total of up to 400 megawatts of clean, green wind power.

Another signal of my government's commitment to the environment is its continued support for the EnerGuide program.

EnerGuide and the federal ecoENERGY Retrofit-Homes program were designed to assist families in making their homes more energy efficient.

These programs have helped Saskatchewan homeowners reduce greenhouse gas emissions by an estimated 75,535 tonnes per year.

That's the same as taking 13,730 cars off the road.

Despite a federal decision to suspend the ecoENERGY program, my government this year allocated an additional \$9.4 million to the EnerGuide budget.

With EnerGuide scheduled to wind down in the spring, my government will use this opportunity to develop a new program that will continue to encourage homeowners to make energy efficiency upgrades.

My government is also moving ahead with a new multi-material recycling program in Saskatchewan.

Innovation is the wellspring from which future prosperity is drawn.

In addition to the many steps my government has already taken to encourage growth in innovation, my government is pledging to invest \$20 million over the next five years in a new technology commercialization fund.

With the backing of the federal government, Saskatchewan universities and the private sector, my government's plan is to enhance our support for Saskatchewan graduate students, especially in fields of new technologies and telecommunications.

There may be unexpected turns along the way as Saskatchewan travels on its new road.

For example, in recent weeks, there has been tremendous interest in the future of PotashCorp.

My government has made it clear that, no matter who owns the potash mines, the potash belongs to the people of Saskatchewan.

This principle, and the best interests of our province and its people, will guide the actions of my government in its deliberations on this important matter.

After weeks of careful review and analysis, my government has determined that the proposed takeover of PotashCorp by BHP Billiton presents too many risks to the people of our province and fails to provide a net benefit to Saskatchewan and Canada.

During this session, the Assembly will consider a resolution calling on the federal government to reject this foreign takeover bid.

In the next few weeks, my government will review a series of recommendations from the Independent Panel examining Saskatchewan's Child Welfare system.

This review will provide my government with an opportunity to review longstanding efforts in this area, and continue a commitment to improve the lives of vulnerable children and youth.

One initiative my government looks back on with justifiable pride was the launch in October of 2009 of the Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability program.

Work will continue on expanding enrollment and examining further opportunities for a more individualized income support system.

My government realizes that a lack of affordable homes is creating challenges across Saskatchewan.

To address this issue, details will soon be provided regarding a new program, Headstart On a Home.

This new initiative will see my government help in the private sector construction of 1,000 new affordable homes over the next five years.

Saskatchewan's new road followed the torch to Vancouver for the Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games.

In order to succeed, future Saskatchewan Olympians and Paralympians require more than our moral support.

My government, in cooperation with SaskSport, is creating a special program for high performance athletes.

The new Saskatchewan Program for Athletic Excellence will support these young people as they train.

This new program will support high performance athletes to a maximum of \$6,000 each year in addition to existing funding programs.

Saskatchewan's new road will take visitors to new provincial parks.

This fall, my government will begin identifying locations for new provincial parks and begin public consultations.

This is in addition to the 1,000 electrified campsites my government has promised.

Work on fulfilling that promise is ahead of schedule.

My government remains committed to ensuring children in our province get enough exercise.

The Ministry of Education has developed guidelines to make sure this happens.

To date, there have been some promising success stories.

Based on this success, the Ministry of Education will launch a new program, called “School Challenge Healthy Kids”.

Students will get at least 30 minutes of exercise each day and be urged to make healthy food choices at school and at home.

A new emphasis on fostering relationships with other jurisdictions and engaging the world has led to the creation of a New West Partnership with Alberta and British Columbia.

Together, these three jurisdictions are telling the powerful story of western Canada to the rest of the world.

My government has made a concerted effort to tell the Saskatchewan success story throughout Canada and around the world.

This effort will continue through a new national advertising campaign, targeting investors, ex-patriots and skilled workers.

During the summer months, a decision by my government to fund clinical trials for a new MS treatment garnered considerable public and media attention.

Our province has one of the highest rates of MS in the world.

The decision was based on the broad, but admittedly anecdotal evidence concerning the efficacy of this treatment.

Many Canadian and some Saskatchewan patients have gone to considerable expense and inconvenience to receive this new treatment.

They deserve the best answers science can provide.

This is why my government is moving forward with these trials.

To that end, my government is committing \$5 million to fund MS liberation clinical trials in Saskatchewan, based on proposals we receive from the scientific community.

A successful proposal will be chosen in early 2011, with clinical trials slated to begin this spring.

Governments can choose to wait on the sidelines, simply benefiting from the investments of others.

Or, governments can take an active role in advancing scientific understanding.

On Saskatchewan's new road, this is the approach we will take.

THE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

In the coming months, members of this Assembly will have the opportunity to debate a series of important pieces of legislation, aimed at improving the lives of Saskatchewan people.

New legislation will be introduced this fall to protect whistleblowers in Saskatchewan's public service through the establishment of a new Public Disclosure Commissioner.

There will be legislation to increase penalties for those who mistreat farm animals.

Changes will be proposed to reduce provincial court delays and increase transparency and accountability for complaints involving provincial court judges.

My government will also introduce new human rights legislation to streamline the complaints process and improve efficiency.

Changes to the *Local Government Election Act* will establish four-year terms for municipal politicians and give municipalities the authority to require photo ID when conducting local elections.

My government will also be introducing a similar act, requiring voters to produce photo ID when voting in provincial elections.

CONCLUSION

During this session, the Estimates for the New Year commencing April 1, 2011 will be submitted to you.

The Public Accounts for the current year have been tabled.

Saskatchewan is now well on its journey down the new road.

The story of that journey is being told by many different voices.

There are the voices of the women and men coming to our province from throughout Canada and from around the globe.

They come to our province in search of a prosperity that is entrenched and opportunity that is available to all.

There are the voices of the most vulnerable in our society, now more able to live in independence.

There are the voices of our seniors, now being afforded the dignity and respect they deserve.

And there are the voices of children, who will travel the furthest on this new road.

The author and essayist Neil Postman says children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see.

Today, our new road leads to the future we desire for ourselves and for our children.

Today, the new road leads to Saskatchewan.

On this road in the new Saskatchewan, the greatest traits of Saskatchewan people are manifest.

Their resolve is strong.

Their compassion is unrivaled.

Their vision is clear.

And their future is brighter than it has ever been before.

Together, we travel down this new road with anticipation and confidence.

I now leave you to the business of the Session, knowing that you will favourably discharge your duties and responsibilities.

May divine providence continue to bless our province and guide this Assembly in all of its deliberations.

God Bless Saskatchewan.

God Bless Canada.

And God Save the Queen.

