



Speech from the Throne 2013

Delivered on the Occasion of the Opening of

The Third Session of
the Twenty Seventh Legislature
Province of Saskatchewan

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Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan

*MEETING THE
CHALLENGES OF GROWTH*

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

Welcome to the opening of the Third Session of the Twenty-Seventh Legislature.

Just a few weeks ago, our province's population surpassed 1.1 million people.

Saskatchewan has grown by more than 100,000 people in just six years – a rate of growth not seen since the earliest days of our province.

This kind of growth brings many new opportunities and many new challenges.

One year ago, my government released the Saskatchewan Plan for Growth.

This Growth Plan has two overriding goals: to ensure Saskatchewan continues to grow and to ensure our province and my government are meeting the challenges of growth.

CONTINUING THE GROWTH

The pace of growth in Saskatchewan is actually increasing.

In the most recent quarter, Saskatchewan grew by 6,895 people – the largest increase ever recorded in one quarter.

The Conference Board of Canada recently forecast that Saskatoon and Regina will lead the nation in economic growth in 2013.

Across rural Saskatchewan, harvest is winding down and it appears that Saskatchewan farmers have produced the largest crop in our province's history.

Our resource companies continue their massive expansions.

Through the first nine months of 2013, employment is up by nearly 20,000, putting Saskatchewan on pace for the best year of employment growth ever recorded.

While most of this growth has been driven by Saskatchewan businesses, my government will continue to play its role by encouraging further diversification of our resource-based economy, marketing our province throughout the world and maintaining a competitive tax and regulatory environment that encourages new investment and new jobs.

MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF GROWTH

While growth creates many opportunities, it also creates many challenges: new pressures in areas like health care, education, highways and housing.

Much has already been done to address these challenges but much more needs to be done.

In this session, my government will focus on meeting the challenges of growth.

HEALTH CARE

In 2009, my government announced an aggressive strategy to significantly reduce surgical wait times.

The Saskatchewan Surgical Initiative set an ambitious goal: that no one in the province would have to wait more than three months for their surgery.

This goal is being met.

My government is committed to improving seniors' care in our province.

This past summer, my government conducted the most comprehensive review of long-term care facilities ever undertaken in Saskatchewan.

This review identified many concerns with the care some residents have been receiving.

We must do better.

That's why my government has created a \$10 million Urgent Issues Action Fund to address the issues identified, like purchasing required equipment, more baths, improved nutrition, improved responsiveness to call bells and better training to deal with patients with dementia.

We will also take steps to reduce pressure on the long-term care system by launching new home care pilot programs in Saskatoon and Prince Albert.

This initiative will build on my government's \$2 million investment in the Home First/Quick Response program launched in Regina this year.

Thousands of Saskatchewan seniors reside in personal care homes.

Personal care homes are inspected and licensed by the Ministry of Health but inspection reports are not disclosed to the public.

Seniors and their families should have access to this information as they select a personal care home.

My government will amend *The Personal Care Homes Act* to allow for the public disclosure of inspection reports.

Over the past six years, the number of doctors practicing in the province has increased by 300.

Doctors have an important role to play in my government's efforts to improve care for seniors.

In the months ahead, we will announce details of a program that will enable some seniors with complex issues to receive house calls from physicians, nurse practitioners and other health care providers.

Last year, my government announced a new approach to delivering primary and emergency care in rural areas.

Collaborative Emergency Centres are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and provide stable, predictable access for patients in rural areas.

Last month, the first Collaborative Emergency Centre opened in Maidstone.

In the coming months, others will open in Shaunavon, Spiritwood, Wakaw and Canora.

It is estimated that one per cent of the patients using our health care system account for about one-third of all health care expenditures.

In the coming year, my government will launch “hot spotting” pilot programs in Saskatoon and Regina to assist high-risk, high-use patients who repeatedly show up in emergency rooms.

This initiative will connect patients not well served by the current system with the appropriate services outside emergency rooms.

Some of these patients require care for mental health or addictions issues.

My government will develop a comprehensive action plan to improve access to mental health and addictions services.

EDUCATION

Upon taking office, my government brought a new approach to health care called Patient First.

In the area of education, our priority is putting students first.

The Student First approach will build on successes that are already being achieved in school divisions throughout the province.

For example, the Chinook School Division has used student reading assessments to help teachers respond to each individual student’s needs.

Clearly, this approach is working.

In 2008, 63 per cent of students were reading at grade level.

By 2012, this number had increased to 84 per cent.

There are similar success stories in schools throughout the province.

The goal of Student First is to identify and replicate these successes.

An important step in the development of Student First will be a wide-ranging consultation with teachers, administrators, parents and students.

Based on what my government has already heard from teachers, the curriculum development process is under review and other education changes are on hold, pending the outcome of the consultation process.

Early Years Evaluation for Prekindergarten and Kindergarten students and Tell Them From Me surveys will continue.

Last year, nearly 75,000 students and over 4,000 teachers took part in the Tell Them From Me survey, an online, anonymous survey that provides students and teachers in Grade 4 to 12 an opportunity to provide feedback on their school experience.

This year, 90,000 to 100,000 students are expected to participate.

This feedback will play an important part in setting the future direction of our education system.

If students are to reach their potential, they need to feel safe in school.

In this session, my government will respond to anti-bullying recommendations put forward by the Legislative Secretary responsible, based on extensive consultations she held throughout the province with students, parents and teachers.

My government will also host a forum during National Anti-Bullying Week in November to discuss directly with students bullying and its prevention.

Students also need space to learn.

A growing Saskatchewan requires new schools and classrooms to support its increasing student population.

Since 2007, my government has invested more than \$600 million to build 20 new schools and undertake 23 major renovations in addition to completing approximately 900 smaller capital projects.

This week, my government announced nine new joint-use schools that will be built using an innovative P3 bundling approach through SaskBuilds.

My government has also supported the development of 15 new Prekindergarten programs and the development of 500 new child care spaces, bringing the total number of licensed child care spaces in Saskatchewan to more than 13,700 – a 48 per cent increase since 2007.

This spring, the Premier met with a number of teachers from different parts of the province.

Almost all of them identified slow and inadequate internet access in schools as a barrier to learning.

In response to this concern, SaskTel will invest \$5 million over four years through the CommunityNet program to increase bandwidth and improve internet access and speed at schools throughout the province.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

My government has provided record support to Saskatchewan's post-secondary institutions and students – a total of \$4.6 billion since 2008.

More than 4,500 students have seen their tuition costs reduced through the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship and more than 40,000 have received part or all of their tuition costs back through the Saskatchewan Graduate Retention Program.

Since 2007, my government has provided \$388 million in direct student support, a 120 per cent increase over the previous six years.

Earlier this year, Briercrest College and the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST) were given the authority to grant degrees in certain programs.

This will allow for greater choice and flexibility for students to take new and innovative courses that support our growing economy.

My government will support SIAST as it evolves into a polytechnic institution which combines the practical approach of a college education with the depth of study usually associated with a university program.

Polytechnic graduates can obtain degree-level programming, certificate, diploma or apprenticeship credentials and bring a high level of practical experience to the workforce.

HIGHWAYS

A growing province means growing pressure on our highway system.

My government is responding.

This year, we will spend more than \$500 million on highways, bringing the total investment over the past six years to \$3.7 billion – 76 per cent more than in the previous six years.

This investment has been used to repair or rebuild 8,000 kilometres of highways in every part of the province.

In recent weeks, the new Circle Drive South Bridge opened in Saskatoon and the new overpass opened on the west side of Regina, improving traffic flow in our two largest cities.

We are breaking ground on a new truck bypass at Estevan and building passing lanes on Highway 10.

My government is also exploring an opportunity to use a public-private partnership to construct the South Regina bypass.

The twinning of Highway 11 between Saskatoon and Prince Albert will be completed this fall.

Twinning is required elsewhere as traffic volumes grow.

My government has started pre-construction work on three new twinning projects:

- 26 kilometres of Highway 16 from Saskatoon to Clavet;
- 24 kilometres of Highway 7 from Saskatoon to Delisle; and
- Eight kilometres of Highway 39 from Estevan to Bienfait.

More work is also being done on many secondary highways.

My government is developing modeling that will more accurately predict increases in traffic volume caused by industrial activity.

This will be helpful in areas like southeast Saskatchewan, where increased activity in the oil and gas industry has boosted the amount of highway traffic.

In particular, Highways 6 and 39 running between Regina and Estevan have seen truck traffic increase significantly over the last decade.

In the coming year, the Ministry of Highways will begin to plan the twinning of this section of highway.

Sadly, our province has seen an increase in the number of traffic fatalities.

Many of those accidents involved alcohol.

During this session, my government will act on the recommendations of the Legislative Assembly's Special Committee on Traffic Safety, with a particular focus on tougher penalties for drinking and driving.

INVESTING IN INFRASTRUCTURE

Since 2008, government ministries and Crown corporations have invested an unprecedented \$13.2 billion in infrastructure – a 110 per cent increase over the previous six years.

New hospitals and schools have been constructed, water and sewer systems have been rebuilt or replaced and the province's electrical system is undergoing a long overdue refurbishment and expansion.

But there is more work to be done.

In the Growth Plan, my government committed to invest \$2.5 billion in infrastructure over three years, not including investments by our Crowns.

We are on track to meet that objective.

The federal government has announced its commitment to create a renewed Building Canada Fund.

My government will have money in place to partner with the federal government and municipalities when the new program begins.

SaskBuilds, a new organization established to pursue innovation in infrastructure development, is exploring ways to complete large, high-cost infrastructure projects in a timely manner through the use of P3s.

SaskBuilds is working with government ministries on the development of new schools, the new Saskatchewan Hospital in North Battleford, a new long-term care facility in Swift Current and the Regina Bypass project.

P3s will allow the government to advance certain capital projects more quickly while reducing costs.

Saskatchewan's Crown corporations are investing record amounts to ensure they can continue to provide high-quality service to a growing province.

This year, SaskPower will spend more than \$1.3 billion to renew and upgrade Saskatchewan's electrical infrastructure.

SaskEnergy will spend more than \$180 million this year expanding and ensuring the integrity of its distribution system.

SaskTel will invest more than \$300 million this year in a range of capital projects, including an expansion of the province's 4G wireless network and an enhancement of internet service in rural Saskatchewan.

The Crowns are partnering with the private sector and northern communities to bring much-needed telecommunications infrastructure to the north.

A SaskTel partnership with Huawei and the Athabasca Development Corporation will result in new cellular sites in Fond du Lac, Stony Rapids, Black Lake and Wollaston Lake.

The Northern Fibre Expansion Project is a partnership between SaskTel, SaskPower and Cameco to bring high-speed bandwidth to the north through 566 kilometres of new fibre placement.

HOUSING

Housing is in demand as the province grows.

My government has committed \$344 million to expand the housing supply by 12,600 units and repair or update about 24,000 units by 2016.

Last year, Saskatchewan led the nation in housing starts on a per capita basis.

The total number of rental starts in 2011 and 2012 exceeded the number of rental starts in the previous 16 years combined.

This activity is leading to an improvement in vacancy rates.

Saskatchewan now has an overall vacancy rate of three per cent, a level recognized as representing a balanced market situation.

However, vacancy rates in some communities are still too low.

This is why my government will broaden the HeadStart on a Home program to encourage the construction of rental properties.

Since its creation in 2011, HeadStart on a Home has provided more than \$193 million to finance the construction of 1,159 entry level homes.

In order to maintain their independence, seniors with low to moderate incomes often wish to sell their homes and move into housing that is more affordable and easier to maintain.

Life lease housing programs provide affordable and suitable housing for seniors along with security of tenure for a lifetime.

In the next few months, my government will renew and expand the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation's Life Lease Program to improve housing options for seniors across Saskatchewan.

COMPETITIVENESS

Saskatchewan has one of the fastest growing economies in the country and the lowest unemployment rate.

There are a record number of people working in our province.

Businesses could employ even more people but there is a shortage of skilled labour.

My government, working with educational institutions and employers, will create 1,000 new training seats this year.

This includes another 300 new apprenticeship seats, bringing the total number of seats to 6,700, an increase of 76 per cent since 2007.

Crown corporations will also expand opportunities for apprentices and fund training seats at SIAST and the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies.

Seven hundred new spots will be added to reduce the backlog of applications to the Adult Basic Education (ABE) program.

This will bring the total number of ABE seats to 8,580 – an increase of 46 per cent since 2007.

This important program provides the fundamental learning required by those who desire to improve their skills and advance in the workplace.

My government's goal is to eliminate the ABE waitlist by the end of this term of office.

Saskatchewan Government Insurance (SGI) estimates that just 30 per cent of on-reserve high schools in Saskatchewan provide driver education.

This has severely constrained the ability of First Nations students to obtain driver's licenses, creating barriers to mobility and employment for those students.

SGI has committed to fund driver education programs for on-reserve high school students in the province.

It is anticipated that 2,600 First Nations students will take advantage of this program in its first year.

Immigration is an important source of labour for our province.

My government was successful in obtaining more than 25 per cent of the new provincial immigration nominations the federal government allocated across the country this year.

This raised the annual cap under the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program to 4,450 nominations.

My government will continue to press the federal government to boost the number of nominations to 6,000 a year.

Our growing manufacturing industry is an important part of the Saskatchewan economy, providing stable employment to over 27,000 people and over \$14 billion in annual sales.

In order to continue this growth in a competitive world, the industry will need to adopt new and innovative measures.

My government will seek to partner with the manufacturing industry to create a new Manufacturing Centre of Excellence.

This centre will focus on enhancing competitiveness, labour market development and innovation so that our manufacturers will continue to be successful both within Canada and abroad.

One specific focus of the centre will be providing Saskatchewan's First Nations and Métis people with the skills training needed for manufacturing jobs while encouraging and assisting employers in hiring Aboriginal workers.

This new Centre of Excellence will assist Saskatchewan manufacturers as they continue to diversify our province's resource-based economy.

My government has established the Global Transportation Hub (GTH) as an independent and self-sustaining inland port authority.

The GTH added several new clients during the last year, including Emterra Group, the City of Regina's recycling contractor, and Morguard, one of Canada's largest real estate investment trusts.

Canadian Pacific has completed the transfer of its intermodal operation from downtown Regina and is now fully operational at the GTH.

Next month, football fans from across Canada will gather in Regina for the 101st Grey Cup.

The Canadian Football League championship – and Canada’s national party - caps a remarkable year that saw Saskatchewan host a number of major Canadian cultural and sporting events, including the JUNOS and the Memorial Cup.

To build upon this success, my government will soon unveil an event hosting strategy through Tourism Saskatchewan.

This strategy will enhance Saskatchewan’s growing reputation as a preferred location to hold national and regional events and will showcase our province throughout Canada and around the world.

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Saskatchewan’s expanding economy is fueled by exports as a growing world buys more of what our province has to offer.

In 2012, Saskatchewan companies exported a record \$32.6 billion worth of products, a 10.3 per cent increase from the year before and triple the amount exported a decade ago.

Saskatchewan is now Canada’s largest per capita exporter.

My government understands that in a competitive world, we can’t take this business for granted.

Accordingly, we are working hard to engage our customers, particularly in Asia, the fastest growing region in the world.

My government has worked hard to ensure that new international uranium markets are available for our industry.

For the first time ever, Saskatchewan uranium is moving into the Chinese civilian market.

My government will continue its support for the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership (STEP), which does an outstanding job in helping Saskatchewan companies promote their products and increase exports throughout the world.

My government will also create the Saskatchewan International Future Scholarship to provide up to 20 students annually with the opportunity to study business at an international institution provided they return to the province after they graduate.

Earlier this year, the Premier visited Washington, D.C. where he continued our province's efforts to push for US approval of the Keystone XL pipeline and promoted Saskatchewan's innovative work in the area of carbon capture and storage.

RESOURCE SECTOR EXPANSIONS

My government is helping the uranium industry grow with a new royalty system that recognizes the actual capital costs incurred by companies.

This will provide an incentive for the industry to increase production and invest in new mines.

The expansion of Saskatchewan's potash industry, which will see more than \$20 billion invested, is continuing.

My government is pleased BHP Billiton has decided to invest another \$2.6 billion over the next three years in its Jansen project.

This is an important vote of confidence in our potash industry and Saskatchewan.

INNOVATION

Saskatchewan has a long tradition of innovation in business, science and agriculture.

Early next year, Saskatchewan will record another first at the Boundary Dam Power Station near Estevan.

Operations will begin at the Boundary Dam 3 project, the world's first commercial power plant to be equipped with a fully-integrated post-combustion carbon capture system.

Boundary Dam 3 will be a major advance in the development of carbon capture and storage technology, which must be deployed if coal-fired power generation is to be environmentally sustainable.

Over the last year, three major research institutions were launched in Saskatchewan as key components of my government's innovation agenda.

Strong job growth in innovation is a sign of a diversified economy.

The Global Institute for Food Security, the Sylvia Fedoruk Canadian Centre for Nuclear Innovation and the International Minerals Innovation Institute will drive our province's innovation agenda forward.

The Sylvia Fedoruk Centre has been chosen to manage and operate Saskatchewan's first cyclotron, which will be located at the University of Saskatchewan.

The cyclotron will be used to produce medical isotopes for the new PET-CT diagnostic scanner at Saskatoon's Royal University Hospital.

AGRICULTURE

Agriculture continues to be an important driver of Saskatchewan's economy.

In 2012, Saskatchewan's agriculture exports climbed to a record \$11.2 billion – highest among the provinces and one-third of all Saskatchewan exports.

Our agricultural sector is on pace to set a new record this year, with exports up 13 per cent in the first six months of 2013.

Research is critical to increasing agricultural production and exports.

My government has committed a record \$27.7 million to agricultural research this fiscal year, more than double the research budget in 2007.

This includes \$3 million for the Global Institute for Food Security.

Ensuring market access for Saskatchewan producers and businesses is a priority for my government.

We continue to support the federal government in trade negotiations, such as the Canada-European Trade Agreement and the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

We are also working to address trade irritants such as Country of Origin Labeling in the United States.

My government has made significant improvements to Crop Insurance to help producers better manage risk.

Coverage levels in 2013 were more than double the coverage offered in 2007.

Improving programs will continue to be a priority.

To that end, my government will continue to work with the federal government, Alberta, British Columbia and Manitoba to develop a Western Canadian Livestock Price Insurance Program for cattle and hog producers.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Fiscal responsibility is a cornerstone of my government.

Since 2007, government debt has been reduced by \$3 billion or 44 per cent.

This has reduced total interest costs by \$600 million.

In the Saskatchewan Plan for Growth, my government envisioned a debt-free Saskatchewan and created the Saskatchewan Heritage Initiative to identify options for how best to utilize our resource revenue after the province's debt has been fully retired.

During this session, former University of Saskatchewan President Peter MacKinnon will release his report on the Saskatchewan Heritage Initiative – his recommendations on how best to ensure that resource revenues become a permanent source of wealth for current and future generations.

SAFE COMMUNITIES

While our province is growing, we all want to maintain our vibrant community spirit that makes Saskatchewan the best place in Canada to live.

This spring, my government announced funding to open Angel's Lighthouse, a new transition house in Melfort providing emergency residential services to women and children fleeing domestic violence.

Angel's Lighthouse is the first new transition house in Saskatchewan since 1989.

Helping the victims of crime is a priority for my government.

This year, the Ministry of Justice has allocated more than \$3 million for police-based victim services programs which provide information, support and referrals to victims of crime.

By the end of the fiscal year, these services will be available throughout the province.

Prince Albert was the first community in Saskatchewan to implement a community mobilization model which fosters closer cooperation among the police, community organizations, government ministries and human service agencies, known as the HUB.

The results are impressive.

Since 2011, overall crime in Prince Albert has fallen 18 per cent, violent crime is down 38 per cent and property crime is down 20 per cent.

Yorkton, La Ronge, North Battleford, Moose Jaw and the Estevan/Weyburn region have now implemented the HUB model.

In the months ahead, several other Saskatchewan communities will look at developing their own HUB programs to reduce crime.

This session, my government will amend legislation to improve protection for adults in our community who must rely on others to ensure their well-being and make decisions on their behalf.

One of my government's first acts upon taking office was to protect Saskatchewan residents in the event of a public sector strike by introducing essential services legislation.

This law was recently upheld by the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal.

During this session, my government will amend *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* to include the essential services law.

SOCIAL SERVICES

A growing province generates the revenues necessary to pay for services that help people, like the Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability (SAID) Program.

More than 11,000 Saskatchewan citizens with long-term and enduring disabilities have now enrolled in SAID, an income support program that recognizes their unique needs and experiences.

This year, my government was pleased to boost the benefits paid out under SAID, the third regular increase to take place over a period of four years.

As part of the Saskatchewan Plan for Growth, my government committed to develop a comprehensive disability strategy to ensure Saskatchewan is the best place in Canada for persons with disabilities.

My government will appoint a team of citizens to undertake a comprehensive public consultation on the strategy, led by the Legislative Secretary on Disability Issues.

A few months ago, my government was pleased to increase the benefits paid out under the Seniors Income Plan (SIP).

More than 16,000 Saskatchewan seniors receive SIP benefits every month.

By 2015, benefits under this program will have tripled since 2007.

The work of the Child and Family Agenda has been refocused on the pressing issues facing our children and families: early childhood development, First Nations and Métis education, child welfare, parenting supports, child and youth obesity, crime reduction, mental health and addictions.

Ministries are working together in a similar manner to the HUB initiative to help children succeed in school, keep communities safe and help vulnerable children and families get the services they need.

ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNMENT

My government will also continue to make government more open and transparent by introducing a new *Lobbyists Act* and will establish an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly to oversee its records.

This new Act will make public the lobbying activities of corporations and paid lobbyists.

PARKS AND CULTURE

Saskatchewan's provincial parks make a major contribution to our quality of life.

My government has focused on creating the best experience possible for park visitors by investing almost \$44 million in our provincial park system since 2008.

This funding has supported the development of more electrified camping sites and improved visitor facilities.

This year, there were a record 3.7 million visits to our provincial parks.

My government also announced the creation of the Great Blue Heron Provincial Park north of Prince Albert, the 35th provincial park in Saskatchewan and the first new park in almost 20 years.

ArtsVest Saskatchewan is growing along with the province.

Under this program, my government has partnered with the private sector to provide \$2.4 million to help arts, cultural and heritage organizations.

A few months ago, my government launched Creative Saskatchewan, a new agency that will assist in marketing the work of Saskatchewan artists active in a number of areas, including music and sound recording, film and television, interactive digital media, visual arts and craft and live performing arts.

Creative Saskatchewan will draw on a \$5 million investment fund to support the activities of Saskatchewan artists.

ENVIRONMENT

Saskatchewan's economic success derives from the industry of its people and the blessings of nature.

My government understands its responsibility to ensure those blessings are preserved for future generations.

With the unprecedented growth underway in Saskatchewan, there has been an increased demand for water.

My government has implemented a 25-Year Saskatchewan Water Security Plan to ensure our water resources are used in a sustainable manner.

In the last few years, agricultural drainage has become an issue of concern for farmers, landowners, municipalities and environmental groups.

As we work toward developing new regulations, my government has begun consultations on agricultural drainage that include an innovative online forum.

CONCLUSION

Saskatchewan continues to grow.

A growing province is a good thing, but my government is aware of the challenges arising from growth and is determined to meet those challenges.

We are mindful the growth we seek is not an end in itself but a means to build a better province for all Saskatchewan people.

We move forward more confident than ever that our resilient, determined, optimistic citizens can meet any challenge as they work to fulfill the enormous potential of this great province.

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 its deliberations.

God bless Saskatchewan.

God bless Canada.

And God save the Queen.

