Speech from the Throne 2016

Delivered on the Occasion of the Opening of

The First Session of the Twenty Eighth Legislature Province of Saskatchewan

Tuesday, May 17, 2016

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Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan

KEEP SASKATCHEWAN STRONG

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

Welcome to the opening of First Session of the 28th Saskatchewan Legislature.

Just a few weeks ago, the people of Saskatchewan chose the women and men who will have the tremendous honour and responsibility of serving in this Assembly.

My government wants to begin the first session of this new Legislative Assembly by saying thank you.

Thank you to all of the candidates who stood for election on April 4th.

Our vibrant democracy is well-served by an active debate and contest of ideas between strong candidates from all parties.

Thank you to the thousands of volunteers who worked on campaigns throughout the province – giving of their time and effort to make Saskatchewan a better place.

Thank you to all the Elections Saskatchewan officials who administered a fair and impartial election process.

But most of all, thank you to the people of Saskatchewan who took the time to consider all the options and make their choice.

The 61 Members of this new Legislative Assembly are grateful for and humbled by the trust you have placed in them and will work hard every day to be deserving of that trust.

My government also wants to thank the people of Saskatchewan for their heartfelt responses to the horrific events in La Loche and in Fort McMurray.

Saskatchewan will continue to stand with those communities as they recover and heal from these tragedies.

KEEPING SASKATCHEWAN STRONG

On April 4th, my government was re-elected based on a campaign that made few specific promises, but instead made one simple yet significant commitment – to keep Saskatchewan strong.

During this session, my government will keep its promises and it will honour its commitment to keep Saskatchewan strong in three key areas:

- My government will keep our economy strong;
- It will keep the province's finances strong; and
- It will keep Saskatchewan's position in Canada strong by always standing up for Saskatchewan's interests.

KEEPING PROMISES

During this session, my government will move forward on the campaign commitments it made to keep Saskatchewan strong and provide a better quality of life for all Saskatchewan people.

Over the past eight years, my government has made record investments in highways and infrastructure, repairing and rebuilding over 10,000 kilometres of Saskatchewan roads.

Still, there is more work to be done and more highways to be fixed.

Starting this year and over the next three years, my government will fix more highways through a $70 million surge in highway repair and maintenance.

This is part of a new Highways 2020 Plan to invest $2.7 billion in highways and transportation capital over the next four years.

In addition to making our highways safer for everyone, this important investment in highways will create economic activity and jobs in the short-term and will strengthen our ability to move Saskatchewan goods to market in the long-term.

My government will also continue to move forward on many other important infrastructure projects underway throughout the province – schools, hospitals, long-term care facilities, the Regina Bypass – using both traditional funding models and public-private partnerships or P3s to ensure Saskatchewan residents receive the best possible value for their tax dollars.

These important infrastructure investments by ministries and Crowns will total $3.6 billion this year - a record investment that will help meet the needs of a growing province, facilitate our growth plan and create jobs and opportunity that will keep Saskatchewan strong.

KEEPING OUR ECONOMY STRONG

Saskatchewan has now enjoyed a decade of growth.

From January 1, 2006 to January 1, 2016, Saskatchewan grew by 150,000 people or 15 per cent – the strongest sustained period of growth since the earliest days of our province.

This is a dramatic turnaround from the previous decade of decline.

From January 1, 1996 to January 1, 2006, Saskatchewan's population dropped by nearly 24,000 people, as thousands left our province to pursue opportunities elsewhere.

My government is committed to ensuring Saskatchewan never returns to those days of decline and that this new era of growth continues.

To that end, my government will consult with industry on the establishment of a new growth tax incentive.

It will be the first innovation tax rate of its kind established in North America.

This new "patent box" tax incentive is designed to create jobs and investment through an advantageous tax rate for the commercialization of patents and intellectual property right here in our province.

My government is also committed to helping small, home-based food businesses grow in Saskatchewan.

To that end, it will allow home-based food producers to sell high-quality, low-risk foods, prepared in the home, directly to consumers and retailers.

These new initiatives build on many steps my government has already taken to encourage economic growth and diversification, including:

- Lowering taxes for businesses, individuals, families, homeowners and farmers;

- Reducing the burden of unnecessary regulation and red tape;
- Working with Saskatchewan exporters to open and expand new markets for Saskatchewan products around the world;
- Actively promoting Saskatchewan's tourism industry; and
- Investing in skills training to match Saskatchewan's labour market needs, with a specific emphasis on First Nations and Metis education and skills training.

Saskatchewan farmers, ranchers and agribusinesses are also keeping our economy strong.

In 2015, Saskatchewan's agri-food exports reached nearly $15.3 billion, surpassing my government's Growth Plan target of $15 billion in exports by 2020.

Over the past few years, the people and economies of Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia have benefitted from our provinces working closely together to lower interprovincial trade barriers and harmonize regulations though the New West Partnership.

My government congratulates the newly-elected government of Manitoba and looks forward to working with them on many important issues, including their campaign commitment to join the New West Partnership.

Despite the significant challenges facing our resource sector, Saskatchewan's strong and diversified economy continues to attract new investment.

In just the last few weeks, a number of companies have announced major new investments and expansions in Saskatchewan:

- Edgewood Forest Products at Carrot River held its grand opening of a $25 million saw mill expansion expected to employ 50 people;
- Crescent Point Energy announced it will spend about $800 million of its projected $950 million capital budget for 2016 in Saskatchewan;
- Husky Energy will invest more than $1 billion related to heavy oil thermal projects creating approximately 90 fulltime jobs and 500 construction jobs;

- Weil Group is building a $10 million helium facility near Mankota that will supply refined, industrial-grade helium to markets throughout North America;
- RII North America has a $50 million enhanced oil recovery operation near Lloydminster that will raise average recovery rates from 5 to 45 per cent in some reservoirs;
- The K + S Legacy Mine, a $4.1 billion project and the first new potash mine in Saskatchewan in more than 40 years, is expected to begin production in late 2016;
- BHP Billiton has invested $20 million to establish a Carbon Capture and Storage Knowledge Centre in Saskatchewan with SaskPower; and
- Revera is building a $75 million, 216 suite retirement community in Regina, creating 300 jobs during construction and 150 permanent jobs when completed.

These are just of few of the companies that continue to demonstrate their ongoing confidence in Saskatchewan's future by investing in new projects and creating new jobs.

My government thanks all of them for helping to keep Saskatchewan strong.

These kinds of new opportunities have led to Saskatchewan's strong population growth and more young people choosing to stay in Saskatchewan after graduation.

In 2008, my government introduced the most aggressive youth retention program in Canada.

Since then, 58,000 young people have benefitted from the Graduate Retention Program (GRP).

My government is now improving the Graduate Retention Program to allow recipients to use up to $10,000 of their GRP benefits toward the down payment on their first home in Saskatchewan.

In this session, my government will also introduce a legislative amendment to remove the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority from *The Crown Corporations Public Ownership Act*.

This change is part of a campaign commitment to convert 40 government-owned liquor stores to private stores, add 12 new private liquor stores and create a level playing field for liquor retailers in order to provide more choice, more convenience and more competitive pricing for Saskatchewan consumers.

A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE

My government believes that a strong economy ensures a better quality of life for all Saskatchewan people.

Over the past eight years, a growing economy has enabled my government to make important improvements to health care – hiring more doctors and nurses, building new hospitals and long-term care homes and reducing surgical wait lists to the point that in 2015, Saskatchewan had the shortest wait times in Canada.

Again, this is a complete reversal of the previous decade which saw Saskatchewan losing doctors and nurses, hospitals and long-term care facilities closing, and the longest surgical wait times in Canada.

The dramatic turnaround from the longest to the shortest surgical wait times has been due in part to my government's decision to allow private surgeries within the publicly-funded system.

This was recently recognized in a report by former Finance Minister Janice MacKinnon who said: "By focusing reforms on practical solutions rather than ideological preferences, the Government of Saskatchewan has markedly reduced wait times in a fairly short period of time."

Patients in Saskatchewan are now able to pay privately for MRI scans using the "two for one" model the Saskatchewan Roughriders have used for many years.

For every scan paid for privately, the clinic must provide one scan at no charge to a patient on the public list, thereby reducing the public wait list.

My government will expand this innovative approach to include CT scans.

In May 2014, my government launched an innovative remote presence technology pilot project to deliver better health care to Pelican Narrows in northern Saskatchewan.

The project uses advanced robotic telemedicine to enable health care providers to connect with patients remotely and perform real-time assessment, diagnosis and patient management.

My government will fulfill its commitment to provide an additional $500,000 a year to expand this innovative technology to other remote communities.

We have all seen stories of families who suffered a tragic loss of a loved one, but through that loss, the lives of others were saved because the person who died had made the choice to become an organ donor.

Sadly, there are still far too many Saskatchewan people waiting for an organ transplant that will save their lives, and some will not receive that call in time.

Unfortunately, Canada's rates of organ donation are quite low compared to many European countries and the United States.

During this session, my government will ask the Standing Committee on Human Services to examine this issue, including looking at best practices in other countries with a higher rate of organ donation.

The Committee will make recommendations on how to increase the organ donation rate in Saskatchewan.

My government will also introduce changes to the *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* to benefit those caring for a family member in the final stages of life, ensuring they will be eligible for a full 28 weeks of leave per year.

My government will move forward on its campaign commitment to reduce health region administration by $7.5 million a year and re-direct that savings toward improving seniors' care by hiring more registered nurses, licensed practical nurses and continuing care aides in long-term care facilities.

During this session, my government will also fulfill its commitment to help seniors remain in their own homes longer by allowing seniors with household incomes under $70,000 to defer the education portion of their property taxes, beginning in 2017.

My government is committed to providing more green energy in Saskatchewan.

That is why it will extend the current net metering program for residential and commercial customers for another two years.

It is also why my government has forged a new partnership with the First Nations Power Authority.

That new partnership will see First Nations developing 40 megawatts of clean energy generated from solar power and flare gas.

This plan will ensure that First Nations in our province are active participants in the economic benefits associated with the construction of clean energy.

It is a plan that will assist Saskatchewan in moving toward its target of having 50 per cent of electrical power needs generated by renewable sources by 2030.

KEEPING OUR FINANCES STRONG

Despite the challenges in our resource sector, Saskatchewan's finances remain strong.

Our budget deficit remains much smaller and more manageable than our neighboring provinces.

Our debt to GDP ratio is the second lowest in Canada and we continue to enjoy a triple-A credit rating.

In two weeks, my government will present a budget that will keep Saskatchewan strong by keeping our provincial finances strong and by ensuring that the budget returns to balance by 2017.

The upcoming budget will also mark the beginning of a government–wide exercise of transformational change to ensure the sustainability of high quality public services delivered in the most effective, efficient way possible.

STANDING UP FOR SASKATCHEWAN

My government believes in a strong Saskatchewan within a strong and united Canada.

But it is troubling that today, there are some in this country who, given the opportunity, would shut down major parts of Saskatchewan's economy and put thousands of hard-working Saskatchewan people out of work, all in the name of some misguided dogma that has no basis in reality.

There are those who are not comfortable with and even oppose much of what we produce in Saskatchewan and how we produce it - oil and gas, coal and uranium, livestock and grains.

They would prefer that those sectors did not exist and that the thousands of jobs in those sectors did not exist.

They look at those jobs like they are somehow harming the country and the world.

To those people, my government has a message.

You are wrong.

You could not be more wrong.

Saskatchewan feeds Canada and the world.

Saskatchewan supplies energy to Canada and to the world.

What we do here makes Canada a better place.

What we do here makes the world a better place.

My government will take every occasion to stand up for this province, to defend those vital sectors and to stand up for every one of those jobs.

CONCLUSION

For many years, many different leaders have used a metaphor taken from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:14 – the metaphor of the shining city on a hill.

Those who have invoked this imagery, from John Winthrop to John F. Kennedy to Ronald Reagan, have used it to say that those of us who have been blessed by providence have the responsibility to serve as a beacon of hope, welcoming all to our shining city.

Now of course, this is Saskatchewan.

It's hard to find a city on a hill.

But today we have the freshly clad copper dome of this Legislature to serve as our symbol of that shining city.

Let it be a reminder to all of us that we are blessed to live in the best province in the best country in the world.

And for those of us who are particularly blessed with the honour of serving under this beautiful, shining dome, let it serve as a reminder that to whom much is given, much is expected.

Let our new shining dome remind us of where we have been, where we are headed and that Saskatchewan should always be a beacon of hope whose best days are still ahead.

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.