



# Speech from the Throne 2012

Delivered on the Occasion of the Opening of

The Second Session of  
the Twenty Seventh Legislature  
Province of Saskatchewan

Thursday, October 25, 2012

The Honourable Vaughn Solomon Schofield  
Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan

***PLANNING FOR GROWTH***

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

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

The last five years have been a period of remarkable growth in our province.

From July 2007 to July 2012, Saskatchewan's population increased by nearly 80,000 people.

In the last year alone, Saskatchewan grew by more than 22,000 people – the most growth in any year since 1921.

Our cities are growing and so are our rural communities, thanks to our thriving resource sector and renewed strength in agriculture.

This Saturday, the Town of Warman will become the City of Warman – Saskatchewan's 16th city – after seeing its population more than double from 3,500 in 2001 to more than 7,000 today.

Warman is just one example.

Every Saskatchewan city and nearly 80 per cent of Saskatchewan towns saw their population increase during the most recent census period.

This is a remarkable turnaround from the previous census, which saw over half of Saskatchewan cities and more than 85 per cent of our towns decrease in population.

There are also more people working in Saskatchewan than ever before.

In August, the number of people employed in Saskatchewan hit an all-time high of nearly 550,000, after growing by more than 20,000 in just the past year.

My government is committed to ensuring this growth continues, because growth has been good for our province.



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It means a strong economy and more opportunities for our young people.

It means more support for our seniors and lower taxes for families.

It means we can hire more health care professionals, complete more surgeries and shorten wait times.

It means we can balance the budget and reduce the debt.

Growth has meant all of these things for Saskatchewan, and that's why we want it to continue.

## **PLAN FOR GROWTH**

Last week, my government released The Saskatchewan Plan for Growth – Vision 2020 and Beyond.

This plan will ensure our province continues to grow, that Saskatchewan people continue to benefit from the opportunities of growth, and that we are addressing the challenges of growth.

The Plan sets a bold target – 1.2 million people living in Saskatchewan by 2020 – and outlines my government's vision for what that province should look like:

- A thriving economy powered by exports, innovation and the best workforce in Canada;
- Modern infrastructure that supports growth and enhances quality of life;
- An educational system and training programs that meet the needs of students and employers;
- A health care system that is responsive, patient-focused and efficient;
- A clean environment protected by regulations that reconcile economic growth and conservation;
- Thriving, safe communities that are culturally vibrant and welcoming to newcomers; and
- A compassionate society that cares for people in need.

The Plan sets out both the principles of a growth agenda and the actions required for achieving these goals.



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In the months and years ahead, this vision for growth will guide the actions of my government, beginning in this legislative session.

The underlying principle of my government's Growth Plan will continue to be fiscal responsibility.

Today, many provinces and many countries are struggling with growing deficits and crushing debt.

Saskatchewan has chosen a different path.

This spring, my government tabled the only balanced provincial budget in Canada.

This is a key part of the Saskatchewan Advantage and my government will maintain the Saskatchewan Advantage by ensuring that the Growth Plan is achieved within a balanced budget.

## ***INVESTING IN INFRASTRUCTURE***

This summer, government MLAs travelled throughout the province, meeting with people to discuss their priorities.

One message was clear: the government should do more to renew and rebuild Saskatchewan's infrastructure.

In the past five years, my government has invested more than \$5 billion to improve and expand highways, schools, health care facilities and municipal infrastructure.

That total doubles the amount spent during the previous five years.

But even with that significant investment, there is more to be done.

New solutions are required.

My government will establish SaskBuilds - an organization designed to drive innovation in infrastructure financing, design and delivery.

The new SaskBuilds Fund will receive \$150 million to be used to develop partnerships with other levels of government and the private sector.



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My government will work with our municipal partners to develop a new cost-shared municipal infrastructure program through SaskBuilds.

This will ensure that money is in place for the province and municipalities to partner with the federal government on any new infrastructure program.

These partnerships will mean that the \$150 million initial commitment will leverage hundreds of millions of dollars of additional investment for use across the province.

This new infrastructure funding is in addition to my government's ongoing commitment to provide funding for much-needed projects – a commitment of at least \$2.5 billion over the next three years.

We also will work with municipalities and other stakeholders to improve planning to ensure infrastructure investments are coordinated and aligned with future population growth and private sector development.

Saskatchewan has a thriving housing sector, with more than 8,000 housing starts forecast for this year – the most since 1979.

There also has been a major expansion of on-campus housing.

But with the province's population growing at the fastest rate in 90 years, we know more housing is required.

My government will use an array of programs to stimulate private sector development to help ensure housing construction keeps pace with demand.

Government initiatives will help add 12,600 new housing units between 2011 and 2016, giving low and moderate income citizens across the province better access to safe, quality, affordable shelter.

## ***BUILDING THE WORKFORCE***

Today, more people are working in Saskatchewan than ever before.

This means more of our young people are choosing to stay in Saskatchewan and many others are moving to Saskatchewan from other provinces and other countries.



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Still, many available positions go unfilled.

Today, Saskatchewan faces a shortage of skilled labour.

Skilled workers in a variety of occupations are in demand as the economy grows.

At least 60,000 more workers will be required by 2020 to meet the objectives set out in the Growth Plan.

My government has taken steps to address labour market challenges.

Since 2007, \$3.5 billion has been invested in post-secondary education, including more funding for programming to assist First Nations and Métis students.

The number of registered apprentices has increased by 43 per cent and there are now more than 35,000 training opportunities available in Saskatchewan.

My government has aggressively promoted Saskatchewan to convince former residents to return home and to attract newcomers.

My government will continue to pursue these strategies and it will take further steps to ensure Saskatchewan has the right workers, at the right place, at the right time.

These include:

- Adding 300 more apprenticeship spaces and working to develop additional apprenticeship training opportunities for students in high school;
- Beginning to eliminate the backlog of people who want to work but need to develop the basic skills necessary to learn a trade;
- Working with First Nations and Métis organizations on ways to improve educational outcomes and increase employment; and
- Continuing engagement with the federal government to increase the annual cap on the immigrant nominee program by 50 per cent from 4,000 to 6,000.

Addressing the skilled labour shortage is an important aspect of our government's Growth Plan, as is ensuring there is an effective legislative framework for businesses and workers to flourish.



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## **ENHANCING COMPETITIVENESS**

Since 2007, my government has worked to make Saskatchewan more competitive, to enable the province to attract the investment necessary to drive growth.

Personal income taxes, small business taxes and property taxes have been reduced, putting hundreds of millions of dollars back into the pockets of Saskatchewan people and into the Saskatchewan economy.

My government will take further steps to ensure Saskatchewan remains competitive with Alberta and British Columbia, which have lower business tax rates.

Saskatchewan's business tax rate will be lowered from 12 to 10 per cent by 2015.

My government is also working to reduce the regulatory burden on business.

Government ministries and agencies have reviewed regulations and have eliminated many unnecessary barriers to growth.

These efforts to reduce red tape for business will continue through the Regulatory Accountability Initiative.

Regulations are necessary to protect public health, safety and the environment, but they should serve a clear purpose and not impose an unnecessary bureaucratic burden on individuals or businesses.

My government remains on track with its four-year plan to reduce the size of the public service by 15 per cent.

That objective will be met in the upcoming fiscal year, fulfilling the government's commitment to become smaller and more efficient.

This fall, my government will introduce a new Saskatchewan Employment Act that will support economic growth by clearly outlining the rights and responsibilities of employers, employees and unions in the workplace.

With this legislation, Saskatchewan will have the most modern, competitive, fair and balanced labour and employment environment in Canada.

My government will continue efforts to increase the head office presence of major companies operating in Saskatchewan, such as Mosaic, which established its potash headquarters in Regina in 2010, creating 120 new jobs in the city.



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## **AGRICULTURE**

American business writer and broadcaster Andrew Ross Sorkin made this observation a few years ago:

“If you care at all about the future of the world’s food supply, you care – whether you know it or not – about Saskatchewan.”

Thanks to the hard work of our farm and ranch families, Saskatchewan is now Canada’s top agri-food exporting province with more than \$10 billion worth of exports in 2011 – up 60 per cent since 2007.

My government’s goal is to see agricultural exports increase to \$15 billion by 2020.

Research and innovation will be vital to the future success of our farmers and ranchers as we work to continue this growth.

This year’s budget included a record \$20 million for agriculture research, an increase of more than 50 per cent since 2007.

Research will continue to be a priority for my government as we work to meet the demands of a growing population at home and throughout the world.

My government will also focus on potential growth in other areas of agriculture, such as value-added processing and irrigation.

Since 2008, nearly \$30 million in federal-provincial funding has been provided for irrigation expansion and rehabilitation, an increase of \$25 million over the entire term of the previous government.

## **RESOURCES**

Development of Saskatchewan’s vast natural resources – including our massive deposits of potash - is driving economic growth and boosting the profile of our province.

This year, capital investment in Saskatchewan will surpass \$20 billion – a record amount and nearly double the 2007 total.

The potash industry is in the midst of a \$13 billion expansion that will create thousands of jobs and generate millions of dollars in economic activity and provincial revenues.



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K + S Group of Germany is building the first new potash mine in Saskatchewan in 40 years, after being forced to sell its last mine during the nationalization of the industry in the 1970s.

BHP Billiton is continuing to develop its Jansen mine.

PotashCorp, Mosaic and Agrium are all continuing with significant mine expansions.

The potash industry is demonstrating its faith in Saskatchewan.

The same is true of the uranium industry.

In 2013, Cameco Corporation is expected to begin commissioning of the Cigar Lake mine – the world's largest undeveloped high-grade uranium deposit.

Throughout the province, but especially in northern Saskatchewan, the uranium industry provides valuable careers for Saskatchewan people including many First Nations and Métis people.

## ***INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT***

Saskatchewan is on track to surpass British Columbia to become the fourth-largest exporting province.

The rapid growth in investment and exports underscores the importance of engaging with our trading partners.

My government will continue to undertake international trade missions to support our exporters and strengthen ties with other countries – with a goal of doubling the value of Saskatchewan exports by 2020.

Our export industries are supported by the Global Transportation Hub, located west of Regina, which is rapidly developing into a world-class intermodal facility.

During this session, my government will turn the Hub into a self-sustaining Authority which will allow it to expand and open the door to new markets around the world.



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## **INNOVATION**

In Saskatchewan today, researchers are working on many innovative ideas that will drive our economy and make life better for people around the world.

Our innovation agenda is based on the foundation of our province's natural resource wealth – providing the food and energy security the world requires.

My government will continue to enhance Saskatchewan's reputation as an innovator in agriculture by establishing the Global Institute for Food Security.

With over 40 per cent of Canada's arable farm land and more than 30 per cent of the nation's biotech research community located in Saskatchewan, the Institute is well placed to advance innovation in food production techniques and crop management systems to help feed a growing world population.

Ground-breaking energy research and development is also underway.

At the Boundary Dam Power Station, SaskPower and its private sector partners are developing the world's first commercial power plant to be equipped with a fully-integrated carbon capture system.

SaskPower is also in the process of developing a carbon capture test facility at Shand Power Station, where new carbon capture processes will be tested in a commercial setting.

Through its CCS Intelligence Consortium, SaskPower will market information gathered at Boundary Dam and Shand Power Plants and further the development of carbon capture technology throughout the world.

The Sylvia Fedoruk Canadian Centre for Nuclear Innovation was recently renamed to honour Dr. Fedoruk, a former Lieutenant-Governor, a gifted athlete and a pioneer in the field of nuclear medicine, whose research and innovation has extended the lives of millions of cancer patients throughout the world.

The centre is now operational and has commissioned research projects scheduled to begin early in 2013.

It will serve as an important incubator of ideas in the areas of small nuclear reactor technology, nuclear medicine, nuclear safety and materials management.



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## **HIGHWAYS**

In this year's budget, my government invested \$581 million in Saskatchewan highways.

More than 1,200 kilometres of provincial highways have been improved.

With an eye to growth, my government has prioritized the completion of Highway 11 twinning between Saskatoon and Prince Albert, a new passing lane pilot project and the construction of the West Regina Bypass which is part of a long-term plan that will ease traffic congestion within Regina and help shippers move goods more efficiently around the city.

But we have much more work to do.

That is why my government recently committed another \$50 million to high-priority highway projects across the province.

In August of this year, 18-year-old Ashley Richards was working her first day as a flag person on a highway construction crew.

Ashley died after being struck by a car driving through a construction zone, a tragedy that was entirely preventable.

Working with the RCMP, my government has already taken action to improve safety in Orange Zones throughout Saskatchewan.

Additional measures will be taken to protect workers.

Fines for speeding through construction zones will be increased to triple the normal penalty.

My government also will introduce a legislative amendment to allow police to ticket drivers speeding through construction zones through the use of photo radar.

My government's strong desire is that these measures will cause drivers to slow down in the Orange Zone so this tragedy is never repeated.



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## **EDUCATION**

A society without the capacity or willingness to educate its young people will cease to move forward.

Saskatchewan is moving forward and education is a priority for my government.

During the past five years, my government has invested \$3.5 billion in the province's post-secondary education system.

We also have taken steps to make post-secondary education more accessible and to encourage the province's young people to study here.

My government introduced the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship which provides high school graduates with up to \$2,000 over four years to attend a Saskatchewan post-secondary institution.

This fall, approximately 4,000 students received the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship.

The Saskatchewan Graduate Retention Program provides tuition rebates of up to \$20,000 over seven years to post-secondary graduates who stay in the province.

This fall, my government will introduce legislation to create the Saskatchewan Advantage Grant for Education Savings.

This new program will help Saskatchewan families who are saving for their children's post-secondary education by providing up to \$250 per year per child.

My government will support schools as they prepare students for post-secondary studies through a new Student Achievement Initiative.

This four-year program will see the introduction of provincial assessments for each student enrolled in the kindergarten to Grade 12 system.

By 2016, all school divisions will consistently and transparently measure and report student progress.

Parents and educators will have a clear picture of a student's performance and how it might be improved.

High school completion is a priority for my government.

Our goal, as outlined in our Growth Plan, is to have the province lead the country in high school graduation rates by 2020.



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By next year, all school divisions will report baseline graduation rates and establish graduation rate targets.

My government knows all students – First Nations, Métis and non-Aboriginal – deserve the same opportunities to learn and succeed.

Last year saw the launch of the First Nations and Métis Education and Employment Joint Task Force.

An interim report on the work of the Task Force is due by the end of 2012.

The recommendations of the Task Force will inform my government's actions to ensure all students reach their full potential.

## **HEALTH**

My government continues to make progress reducing surgical wait times.

Since November 2007, the number of patients waiting more than a year for surgery has been reduced by 81 per cent.

The number of patients waiting more than six months has been reduced by 56 per cent.

By utilizing LEAN techniques and private sector delivery where it makes sense, my government is on track to meet its goal that no patient will wait longer than three months for surgery by 2014.

Saskatchewan was the first province in Canada to commit funding for research into the Liberation Therapy treatment of Multiple Sclerosis symptoms.

The first of 86 Saskatchewan patients have travelled to Albany, New York to participate in clinical trials and more will follow during the next two years.

My government has kept its promise to bring the Shock Trauma Air Rescue Service (STARS) to Saskatchewan.

Since this service began providing emergency response out of Regina in April, STARS helicopters have flown more than 75 emergency missions throughout southern Saskatchewan.

Earlier this month, STARS began operating out of Saskatoon.



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In the months ahead, my government will continue to work with the Physician Recruitment Agency of Saskatchewan to step up efforts to retain Saskatchewan-trained physicians.

However, we recognize that the province's population growth will require the recruitment of additional international medical graduates.

This fall, 24 international medical graduates entered the Saskatchewan International Physician Practice Assessment.

Since the program began in 2011, 37 foreign-trained family physicians have successfully completed the assessment and more than 90 per cent are practicing in a rural or remote community.

In the upcoming year, up to 90 international medical graduates are expected to enter the assessment.

Nearly 9,000 Saskatchewan children contract rotavirus each year.

Beginning this fall, my government will expand the infant immunization program to provide free, universal access to the rotavirus vaccine.

Expanding our public immunization program ensures the best protection is available for all infants and young children, while reducing costs for families and the health care system.

Earlier this year, the Premier appointed a new Minister of Rural and Remote Health.

The Minister spent the summer travelling through rural and northern Saskatchewan where he visited health care facilities and met with health care professionals and community leaders.

The common concerns heard in rural Saskatchewan relate to the recruitment and retention of physicians, the availability of emergency services and the need to utilize health care professionals to the full extent of their training.

In response, this year my government will implement a new team-based approach to providing primary and emergency care in rural and remote settings modeled on Nova Scotia's Collaborative Emergency Centres.

My government continues to fulfill its 2011 commitment to alleviate the shortage of health care workers in rural Saskatchewan.



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My government will forgive up to \$120,000 in student loans for new doctors and up to \$20,000 for new nurses and nurse practitioners who agree to practice in rural, remote or underserved communities for up to five years.

As well, my government will develop a program of partial student loan forgiveness for doctors providing relief services to address temporary doctor shortages in rural and remote areas.

My government is also keeping its promise to establish a 20-doctor rural locum pool and is adding 20 new nurse practitioner training seats over four years.

## **SOCIAL SERVICES**

A society is judged by how it cares for its most vulnerable citizens.

My government's goal is to make Saskatchewan the best place in Canada for persons with disabilities.

Earlier this year, we increased benefits under the Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability program, putting an extra \$2,400 per year in the pockets of people who need it the most.

In the years ahead, my government will build on this investment, adding an average of \$1,800 per year to these benefits by 2015.

But support for persons with disabilities goes beyond financial considerations.

There are concerns around transportation, education, employment, housing and community inclusion.

In consultation with the disability community, my government will develop a comprehensive strategy that will consider all these matters and the important role played by caregivers.

Helping seniors with low incomes continues to be a priority for my government.

By 2015, benefits under the Seniors Income Plan will have tripled in six years, putting up to \$2,100 more per year in the pockets of low-income seniors.



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Increases to the new Personal Care Home Benefit over the next four years will give low income seniors living in personal care homes up to \$4,400 per year in additional income.

Saskatchewan's child welfare system is undergoing a transformation and early indicators are pointing to progress.

The number of children in care has decreased by 17.5 per cent since March 2009 and the number of foster homes with more than four children has dropped by 54 per cent in the same period.

However, a true transformation will occur only when fewer children are entering the system in the first place.

My government will begin development of an early-years strategy that puts a priority on parental training and family supports.

## ***JUSTICE***

During this session, my government will introduce legislation giving the Ministry of Justice authority to oversee the seizure of criminal property which is now administered by police services.

This will make the seizure of criminal property more efficient and effective.

## ***GOVERNMENT RELATIONS***

This summer, Saskatchewan cities launched a campaign highlighting the benefits of growth in Saskatchewan and thanking my government for working in partnership with municipalities.

My government would like to thank municipalities for this partnership as well, and it congratulates and looks forward to working with all the mayors, reeves and councilors who were elected in yesterday's municipal elections.

Our partnership has benefitted from long-term, stable and predictable revenue sharing for municipalities.

In the coming fiscal year, municipalities are expected to receive over \$264 million in revenue sharing, more than double the amount they received in 2007-08.



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## ***PARKS, CULTURE and SPORT***

Consultations are proceeding on a new plan to move creative industries forward.

These discussions are aimed at enhancing opportunities for commercial success in an increasingly digital environment and developing new and innovative strategies to support this sector.

The consultations will lead to a long-term strategy to advance the commercial objectives of creative industries.

My government will continue to support arts and culture.

From 2007 to 2011, funding for arts and culture increased 35 per cent, compared to the previous four years.

My government is proud to support several major events taking place in the province in the coming year.

2013 will be the “Year of Music” in Saskatchewan and will be highlighted by the Juno Awards to be held in Regina and Moose Jaw next April.

2013 will also be a big year for sports in our province.

Junior hockey’s Memorial Cup championship will be held in Saskatoon next May while the Grey Cup will take place in Regina in November.

My government would like to thank the thousands of volunteers who will work to make these events a spectacular success.

From the Athabasca Sand Dunes in the north to the Cypress Hills in the south, Saskatchewan is blessed with beautiful provincial parks.

My government has invested \$46 million over five years in our park system to ensure visitors have the best experience possible.

Saskatchewan citizens are responding.

This year, there were more than 3.5 million visits to our provincial parks – a new record.

More than 60,000 reservations were booked on the government’s new reservation system.

Legislation to establish a new provincial park will be introduced in this session.



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My government will continue to support the province's regional parks, which received a 500 per cent increase in funding during its first term.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

My government understands the importance of balancing economic progress and environmental protection.

Saskatchewan is experiencing unprecedented growth, which is causing an increased demand for water.

We must take strong action to effectively manage our water resources to support our growing population and economy and to ensure environmental sustainability.

The newly-created Water Security Agency will implement a 25 Year Water Strategy to protect water quality and sustain water supplies for residential, industrial, agricultural and recreational users.

This fall, my government will proclaim a new Saskatchewan Environmental Code.

The Code has been developed with the input of more than 200 representatives from a broad array of stakeholders, including First Nations and Métis groups, environmental organizations and municipalities.

The Code will modernize environmental protection by focusing enforcement activities in high-risk areas while encouraging innovation and increasing transparency.

## **CONCLUSION**

During this session, the Estimates for the New Year commencing April 1, 2013 will be submitted to you.

The Public Accounts for the current year have been tabled.

Today, Saskatchewan faces new challenges – the challenges of growth.

The rapid pace of growth in Saskatchewan is creating significant demands for infrastructure, for housing, for labour, and for health and education.



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Still, the challenges of growth are preferable to the challenges of decline Saskatchewan faced just a few short years ago.

My government will continue its growth agenda and will continue to work with Saskatchewan people to meet the challenges and opportunities of growth, confident in the belief that Saskatchewan's 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 its deliberations.

God bless Saskatchewan.

God bless Canada.

And God save the Queen.



