



Speech from The Throne 2024

Delivered on the Occasion of the Opening of

The First Session of
the Thirtieth Legislature
Province of Saskatchewan

Monday, November 25, 2024

The Honourable Russ Mirasty
Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan

A NEW BEGINNING

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

Welcome to the opening of the First Session of the Thirtieth Legislature of the Province of Saskatchewan.

Four weeks ago today, the people of Saskatchewan voted to choose the 61 Members of this new Legislative Assembly.

We should never take for granted the tremendous privilege that we have in our province and our country to freely choose our representatives and our government.

This is a new Assembly and just over half of its Members – 31 of 61 – are taking their seats here for the first time today.

To those new Members, and to all the returning members, congratulations, and welcome to your Legislative Assembly.

You have earned the right to be here by earning the trust and support of your constituents.

I know you will work every day to be worthy of their trust.

A NEW BEGINNING

This first day of the Thirtieth Legislature marks a new beginning for my government.

In every election, voters deliver a message.

In this recent election, Saskatchewan voters delivered two messages.

Many Saskatchewan people voted to re-elect my government to ensure a strong economy and a bright future for our province.

At the same time, many other Saskatchewan people voted for change.

My government will deliver both.

My government will keep our economy strong and work to achieve the targets set in the Saskatchewan Plan for Growth.

A strong and growing economy enables my government to deliver on all the commitments it made during the recent election campaign, including making life more affordable for Saskatchewan people.

My government must also do more to address the challenges of growth – challenges like crowded classrooms and access to health care services.

Voters told us we must do better in these areas, and we will.

A CHANGING SASKATCHEWAN

Saskatchewan has undergone remarkable change since 2007.

Our population and communities are growing and changing.

There are 250,000 more people living in our province.

In 2007, neither Warman nor Martensville were cities.

Today they are, and they are growing.

Since the 2006 Census, Warman has grown by over 160 per cent and Martensville has grown by more than 112 per cent.

Those are just two examples of many growing Saskatchewan communities.

Saskatchewan is on track to achieve many of my government's Growth Plan goals, including:

- 1.4 million people living in Saskatchewan by 2030;
- \$16 billion in annual private capital investment by 2030;
- Increasing agricultural value-added revenue to \$10 billion a year by 2030; and
- Doubling forestry sales to \$2.2 billion by 2030.

Saskatchewan has already achieved and exceeded many of my government's Growth Plan goals, including:

- Increasing total export value by 50 per cent compared to 2018;
- Increasing manufacturing value by 50 per cent compared to 2018;
- Increasing Saskatchewan's agri-food exports to \$20 billion a year; and

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- Increasing the annual value of potash sales to \$9 billion.

Growth is good for our province, but it also means more people who require access to health care services and growing student enrollment.

It is the responsibility of my government to ensure it too is changing to meet the priorities of a changing province.

Today marks a new beginning - a new opportunity to act on what my government heard during the election campaign.

An opportunity to bring a new focus to my government and deliver the changes that will improve the lives of Saskatchewan people.

On the doorsteps, candidates who are now Members on both sides of this Assembly listened to voters.

Those voters said they want their government to:

- Improve access to health care services;
- Provide better support to our children in their classrooms; and
- Better represent them by being more responsive to their concerns.

That message has been heard and my government will act on it.

A new beginning starts with a clear-eyed appraisal of what is working and what is not working.

My government will build on what is working.

In those areas where it must do better, my government will do better.

My government will focus on ensuring that its investments produce results.

That focus will ensure that Saskatchewan people:

- Will be able to find a primary health care provider;
- Will be able to access surgery in a timely manner;
- Will have access to mental health and addiction recovery supports when they are needed; and
- Will feel safe where they live.

That work starts today.

HEALTH CARE

My government will do better to support patients and the health care needs of Saskatchewan people.

My government will continue to accelerate the hiring of health care professionals and will expand urgent care centres to ensure more people have better access to a doctor, nurse practitioner and other health care professionals.

The first urgent care centre in Regina is up and running, and one in Saskatoon is under construction in a partnership with Ahtahkakoop Cree Developments.

Since it opened in July of this year, the Regina Urgent Care Centre has served the needs of 14,000 patients, providing timely access to medical care and to mental health services, and assisting in addressing pressures on the emergency rooms in Regina hospitals.

The urgent care centre is working here in Regina, and that is why my government will open additional urgent care centres in Saskatoon, Prince Albert, North Battleford, Moose Jaw and Regina.

In the first few years after my government was first elected, it focused on reducing surgical wait times.

In 2007, Saskatchewan had the longest surgical wait times in Canada.

By 2014, we had the shortest.

In 2007, about 74,000 surgeries were performed in Saskatchewan.

Last year, more than 95,000 surgeries were completed – an increase of more than 28 per cent.

However, that growth has not kept pace with the number of people needing surgeries and in recent years, surgical wait times have lengthened.

To address this, my government will ensure that 450,000 surgeries will be performed over the next four years.

Increasing capacity will reduce surgical wait times to no more than three months.

To meet the need for more health care infrastructure, five new hospitals are under development in Prince Albert, Weyburn, Esterhazy, Rosthern and Yorkton.

Over four years, my government will invest more than \$2.6 billion into health care infrastructure.

My government will continue to increase the number of doctors, nurses and other health care professionals working in Saskatchewan through its Health Human Resources Action Plan.

There were 1,160 more active practicing nurses and doctors licensed in Saskatchewan in 2023 compared to 2022.

My government will continue to build on its ambitious Health Human Resources Action Plan to further stabilize and strengthen important health care services for urban, rural and northern residents.

Since the Health Human Resources Action Plan was introduced in fall of 2022, my government has successfully recruited thousands of health care workers in communities across Saskatchewan.

Today, 84 per cent of Saskatchewan people have access to a regular primary health provider – a doctor or a nurse practitioner.

That is higher than the national average, but my government knows it can do better.

That is why my government is setting a goal that every Saskatchewan person will have access to a primary health provider by the end of 2028.

My government will reach this goal through partnership and collaboration with our healthcare providers to deliver team-based primary care to Saskatchewan people.

My government will work directly with primary care providers to ensure they have the support they need to deliver healthcare in our province.

To ensure my government engages nurses throughout the province, my government has invited all nursing teams and the unions that represent them to join a first-of-its-kind patient-focused nursing task force.

My government will deliver on its campaign commitments in health care.

It will provide women with the option to do cervix self-screening at home for the human papillomavirus (HPV), the leading cause of cervical cancer.

Saskatchewan will be the second province in Canada to offer this option.

This builds on the commitments made to women's health and cancer care in the 2024-25 Budget, which includes a \$3.5 million increase for breast cancer care, the development of a Breast Health Centre of Excellence in Regina and a \$1 million grant for ovarian cancer research.

My government will make it more affordable for individuals and couples to access fertility treatments by introducing a new fertility treatment tax credit.

My government will help with the cost of monitoring and treating diabetes by expanding no cost coverage for glucose monitoring systems and supplies to seniors and young adults ages 25 and under.

EDUCATION AND CHILD CARE

My government will do more to support children in their classrooms by expanding its specialized support classroom model.

This program is showing positive results in the eight schools in which it has been piloted.

My government will work with school divisions to expand the specialized support classroom pilot to 200 more schools throughout the province.

A child's ability to read at grade level by Grade 3 is the single greatest predictor of future academic success, because this is when they transition from learning to read to reading to learn.

My government will focus on improving reading levels in Kindergarten to Grade 3, giving students every opportunity for academic success throughout their time in school.

More teachers and education support staff will be added to deliver on these commitments.

Not enough has been done to support our children in their classrooms.

My government will address this by increasing funding to school divisions to help them meet the pressures of a growing student enrollment and the challenges of classroom complexity.

More schools will be added to meet the needs of a growing province.

Fourteen new or consolidated school projects and three major renovations are underway in communities throughout Saskatchewan.

My government has also initiated planning for the construction of nine new schools and two major renovations.

My government will expand regulated childcare spaces.

There are more than 5,100 childcare spaces currently under development.

My government has a target to provide funding for 12,000 additional new space developments by the end of the next fiscal year.

AFFORDABILITY

Saskatchewan is the most affordable place to live in Canada.

Still, Saskatchewan people are facing cost of living pressures, just like other Canadians.

My government heard this concern on the doorsteps during the recent campaign.

That is why the centrepiece of my government's election platform was a plan to make life more affordable for students, for seniors, for homeowners, for families and for everyone.

My government will introduce the largest personal income tax reduction in Saskatchewan since 2008 by raising the personal exemption, the spousal exemption, child exemption and the seniors supplement by \$500 a year in each of the next four years, in addition to fully indexing income tax brackets.

As a result, a family of four will save more than \$3,400 over the next four years and a senior couple will save more than \$3,100.

When fully implemented, an additional 54,000 people will no longer pay any Saskatchewan income tax.

The Saskatchewan Low-Income Tax Credit will be increased by 20 per cent over the next four years.

Saskatchewan has one of the lowest inflation rates in Canada, largely due to my government's decision to take the carbon tax off home heating.

That exemption has already been extended by SaskPower for those customers who use electricity to heat their homes.

During this session, my government will introduce legislation to extend the carbon tax exemption on natural gas through 2025, saving Saskatchewan households about \$480 next year.

My government will continue to advocate for the carbon tax to be eliminated completely, but until that happens, we will ensure carbon tax fairness by exempting home heating from the carbon tax.

The Active Families Benefit, and the income threshold to qualify for that benefit, will both be doubled, making children's sports, arts, cultural and recreational activities more affordable for more families.

My government will make it more affordable to buy your first home and to renovate your home.

The Home Renovation Tax Credit will allow homeowners to claim up to \$4,000 in home renovation expenses every year, to a maximum benefit of \$420 annually.

Seniors will be able to claim an additional \$1,000 every year, for a maximum benefit of \$525 annually.

The Saskatchewan First-Time Homebuyers Credit will be increased by 50 per cent, from \$10,000 to \$15,000.

For seniors who reside in a personal care home, the Personal Care Home Benefit will be increased by \$1,000 a month.

My government will improve affordability for persons with disabilities.

In 2008, my government created the Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disabilities (SAID) program in response to requests from the disability community.

The annual amount that an individual, couple or family can earn from employment without having their SAID benefit reduced will be increased by \$1,000.

My government will increase tax credits for persons with disabilities and caregivers.

The Disability Tax Credit will be increased by 25 per cent.

The Disability Tax Credit supplement for children under 18 will also be increased by 25 per cent.

The Caregiver Tax Credit, which provides financial support to families who care for adult children or parents with a physical or mental impairment, will also be raised by 25 per cent.

Bill 1 of this new Legislature will be *The Saskatchewan Affordability Act* – legislation to enact my government’s campaign commitments to reduce taxes and make life more affordable for everyone in Saskatchewan.

A STRONG ECONOMY AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

My government will help keep our economy strong and build vibrant communities.

My government will ensure Saskatchewan is one of the best places in Canada to grow a small business by keeping the small business tax rate at one per cent.

To help support Saskatchewan’s next generation of entrepreneurs, my government will create a young entrepreneur bursary.

The Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce will be provided with funding to work with local Chambers of Commerce to award a \$5,000 bursary to a promising young entrepreneur in their community.

To support the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises in Saskatchewan, my government will develop a new investment tax incentive based on a proposal from the Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce.

To ensure more young people continue to work, live and raise a family in Saskatchewan after they graduate, my government will increase the Graduate Retention Program benefit by 20 per cent.

The maximum benefit for a student with a four-year undergraduate degree will increase from \$20,000 to \$24,000.

The benefit for graduates of one, two and three-year post-secondary programs will also increase by 20 per cent.

My government will introduce a \$5,000 Class 1 Driver Training rebate to help offset the cost of truck driver training.

My government is committed to growing vibrant communities through revenue sharing and additional support to keep our communities vibrant.

Municipal revenue sharing increased to over \$340 million this year.

This funding allows local governments to invest in local priorities.

To provide communities with additional assistance, my government will double the Community Rink Affordability Grant from \$2,500 to \$5,000 per ice surface.

My government will also make it more affordable for school community councils and parents to construct or refurbish school playground equipment through a new School Playground Equipment Fund.

SAFER COMMUNITIES

My government will make our communities safer by continuing our effort to add 500 more police officers and 500 more addictions recovery spaces.

My government will also strengthen legislation to keep our communities and neighborhoods safer.

Amendments to *The Safer Communities and Neighborhoods Act* will provide officers with additional authority to shut down nuisance properties.

Further legislative and regulatory changes will address disruptive behaviour on public property.

Much of today's crime in our communities is being driven by drug addiction.

That is why my government is creating 500 recovery spaces to help individuals access treatment and leave a life of addiction.

More police officers, more access to recovery spaces, more mental health supports and stronger laws – that's my government's plan for safer communities and neighbourhoods.

A MORE RESPECTFUL ASSEMBLY

This Assembly should always be a place of vigorous debate and even strong disagreement.

But that debate and disagreement should always be driven by what is best for those we serve - the people of Saskatchewan.

It should never be driven by malice toward those on the other side or any individual who may serve here or anywhere in the province.

Look at the way this Assembly is configured.

When Members look forward, they do not see the faces of the Members on their own side.

They see only the faces of those on the other side.

I urge all Members to look at those faces and know that they love this province and want what is best for the people of our province, just as you do.

My government will strive to improve the decorum and tone of this Assembly, to disagree without being disagreeable, and to remember that every Member shares the same desire to make Saskatchewan a better place.

CONCLUSION

This first day of the Thirtieth Legislature marks a new beginning for this Assembly and for my government.

Saskatchewan people voted for a strong economy and a bright future, and they voted for a government that will change with a changing province.

My government has heard both messages, and my government will deliver on both messages.

It's time to get to work.

I leave you now to your deliberations, confident that all Members of this Assembly will provide the best possible representation for the people who elected you and for our great province.

God bless Saskatchewan.

God bless Canada.

God save the King.

