



# Speech from the Throne 2006

Delivered on the Occasion of the Opening of

The Third Session of  
the Twenty-Fifth Legislature  
Province of Saskatchewan

Thursday, October 26, 2006

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



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

Welcome all to the opening of the third session of the 25th Legislature. Tansi.

We sit in the Chamber today for the first full legislative session of the second 100 years of our Legislature. On the table in front of us lies a traditionally crafted runner and cushion for our Mace, a blending of First Nations and Parliamentary traditions in the Assembly, just as First Nations and the people of other cultures now live together in Saskatchewan as neighbours under the Treaty relationship.

We are many; we are one.

A particular welcome is extended today to the families who have recently chosen to make their homes in our province, to the youth who have graduated and are building their futures here, and to the musicians and artists we will celebrate in the year ahead. Some of you have joined us today.

## **Where We Have Come From**

As this session opens, many will remember that fifteen years ago, Saskatchewan was on the brink of bankruptcy. The financial future of the next generation was at risk. Social infrastructure was in jeopardy.

There was much hard work and sacrifice in the following decade to restore the province's fiscal foundation.

The results have been dramatic: thirteen consecutive balanced budgets, fourteen credit rating upgrades and the significant reduction of public debt.

Five years ago, our economy had reached a turning point. Today, thanks to the hard work of the Saskatchewan people, our economy is re-energized and there are now more jobs than ever before in our history. Our quality of life remains second to none, and we have a proud record of social progress.

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My government is committed to a plan that ensures Saskatchewan maintains its hard-earned designation as one of only three “have” provinces in this nation, and we proudly reflect on this accomplishment as a “have” province with a heart.

### **Vision for the Future**

A year ago, my government outlined a broad future vision for Saskatchewan. That vision is to seek a province where no one is left behind on the path to opportunity, a province with an unbreakable social fabric, built on the foundation of diverse and growing communities, within a green and prosperous economy.

In the year that has passed, much progress has been achieved toward this vision. Even more progress is planned.

**Ours is a province that is down to earth, but where the sky is the limit.**

### **Focus for the Year Ahead**

The focus for my government in this session is to make life better for today’s Saskatchewan families, and to build an even better future here for young people.

### **Four cornerstones will set the foundation for my government’s agenda:**

- Make Saskatchewan the best place for young people to live, work, and build strong futures;
- Strengthen Saskatchewan’s leadership in improving public health care while reducing wait times and improving access to services;
- Advance Saskatchewan as a leader in environmental protection and the green economy; and
- Ensure that today’s Saskatchewan families benefit from our strong economy.

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# MAKE SASKATCHEWAN THE BEST PLACE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO LIVE, WORK AND BUILD STRONG FUTURES

There is no clearer calling than our collective responsibility to provide a legacy of opportunity for our children. My government's **first cornerstone** is dedicated to that goal, making Saskatchewan the best place for young people to live, work and build strong futures.

Encouragement and support to nurture a lifelong learner's success must begin early in life. These ingredients are some of the essential building blocks for the province's social and economic wellbeing.

My government wants quality options for families with children, and the best in early learning and child care that can be provided. We want all children to be able to read the books they carry home in their book bags from their school or local library.

## **Investments in Education**

To make this happen, the province's Literacy program will expand, and we will deliver Saskatchewan's Early Learning and Child Care Program, despite the federal government's withdrawal from its commitments.

In the year ahead, investments in education will continue to focus on meeting the needs of families and ensuring their children grow into healthy and well-educated adults.

As one example, Saskatchewan will invest in its groundbreaking KidsFirst initiative, which blends the efforts of health districts, school divisions, Aboriginal organizations and communities, and provides

- home visiting programs;
- community supports;
- early development programs;
- pre-natal care; and
- family supports.

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Toward the same goal, building on our education renewal initiative, new School Community Councils will provide parents and community members with opportunities to have real input and make a difference in children's learning at their local schools.

### **Investments in Training**

As young people grow and look to their future here, in whatever walk of life they choose, my government is committed to addressing the labour market's changing needs and will

- expand training opportunities to meet market demands;
- unveil a new partnership between business, labour and our training institutions to provide counsel to government to meet Saskatchewan's evolving labour market needs; and
- strengthen and expand our regional training model to bring education closer to students and better link training to learners, job-seekers and employers.

Additionally, it will

- expand partnerships with First Nations and Métis to enhance education and skills training for Aboriginal youth;
- continue the freeze on university tuition; and
- host a Youth Summit that links young people, business, employers and government in building a bright future for youth in our province.

During this session, my government will also receive and act on a comprehensive review of access to post-secondary education. These actions will address essential issues for students and promote the exceptional range of career opportunities right here at home.

**Ours is a province with abundant career opportunities; a province that is down to earth, but where the sky is the limit for jobs in every corner.**

Last year, we launched a bold initiative to attract 5,000 immigrants annually by 2008, and we are on track to accomplish that goal.

Investments in language training, employment and other services will foster strong beginnings for our newcomers in

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their new neighbourhoods in this province. This includes a program at the College of Medicine to aid the certification of international medical graduates living in Saskatchewan.

My government will also reinvigorate our relationship with the Fransaskois community, with particular emphasis on immigration and employment needs of Saskatchewan francophones.

Mon gouvernement dynamisera nos relations avec la communauté fransaskoise en adressant particulièrement les besoins des francophones de la Saskatchewan dans les secteurs de l'immigration et de l'emploi.

In this 21st century, it is important that we continue to spread the word that Saskatchewan is a great place to live, work and raise a family.

Saskatchewan is home to a diverse, robust and fundamentally strong economy, and our doors are open, with opportunities for workers here at home and from abroad.

All these efforts are in support of my government's focus in this session to make life better for today's families and to build an even better future here for our youth.

## STRENGTHEN SASKATCHEWAN'S LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC HEALTH CARE WHILE REDUCING WAIT TIMES AND IMPROVING ACCESS TO SERVICES

The **second cornerstone of my government's** agenda is to work with health care providers to strengthen Saskatchewan's leadership in public health care, while reducing wait times and improving access to services.

Investments in health care will be the highest they have ever been.

As the birthplace of Medicare, Saskatchewan retains its distinction as the only "have" province in Canada that does not charge its people a health care premium.

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To strengthen the best health care system for families, we will

- enhance efforts to recruit health care providers, using new relocation incentives in return for service commitments, among other initiatives;
- increase opportunities for internationally-educated professionals to work right here, right now; and
- expand the Aboriginal health workforce.

To further improve health care for Saskatchewan families, we will

- continue the progress toward the development of a Children’s Hospital within a hospital;
- provide support for children with mental, physical, or behavioural disabilities and disorders;
- continue the implementation of the Premier’s Project Hope to prevent and treat the devastation caused by drug and alcohol abuse; and
- work with First Nations and Métis leaders to call on the federal government to meet its commitment to achieve the targets agreed upon at the First Ministers’ meeting on Aboriginal issues.

Our seniors and elders fought for Medicare and pioneered this province. They set out to create a better life for their families, children and grandchildren. So too, in this session, my government will introduce new measures to recognize their dedication.

Cornerstone efforts to improve health care and its delivery are firmly in place to meet the goal of making life better for today’s families and to build a future here for our young people.

## ADVANCE SASKATCHEWAN AS A LEADER IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND THE GREEN ECONOMY

For our families to remain healthy and for our economy to prosper, Saskatchewan will be a leader in the protection of the environment and the promotion of clean and renewable energy. The **third cornerstone of my government** speaks to this goal.



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Saskatchewan will demonstrate national leadership in conserving, protecting and restoring the health of our environment and our diverse ecosystems.

In this session, my government will

- implement further steps to achieve our long-term goal of meeting one-third of our energy requirements through renewable resources; and
- work in partnership to research the feasibility of the world's first, Saskatchewan-designed, utility-scale clean coal generating facility.

In addition, my government will

- implement measures to assist in energy conservation;
- carry out a comprehensive plan to develop bio-fuels;
- continue leadership in carbon sequestration and wind power development;
- implement a plan for the mandated use of ethanol;
- ensure a safe water supply for communities; and
- take further measures toward our vision of agroforestry.

Finally, with one-third of the organic farmers in Canada and 60 per cent of the land in this nation which is dedicated to organic farming, this province will lead the way in organic production. Upon completion of work now underway, initiatives will be introduced to expand the production, processing and marketing of local organic food.

**With our connection to the land and our commitment to environmental stewardship, Saskatchewan clearly demonstrates it is down to earth, with only the sky as our limit.**

All efforts in environmental protection will contribute to our goal of making life better for today's families and help to build a future here for our young people.

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## ENSURE SASKATCHEWAN FAMILIES BENEFIT FROM OUR STRONG, PROSPEROUS ECONOMY

Our province has caught the eye of the world. Major investments are being made by national and international companies, including in oil and gas, diamonds, uranium, value-added agriculture, ethanol and potash. Our external trade missions and promotions, and the work of the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership, are bearing fruit.

There have been significant gains made through our university-based capacity for research and commercialization in bio-technology, petroleum, medicine, pharmacy, information technology and greenhouse gas emission reduction.

Saskatchewan's co-operative, financial, manufacturing, tourism, film and video, music, small business and retail sectors are expanding and providing even greater opportunities for Saskatchewan's young people.

All of these developments and more have contributed to the strong economy of Saskatchewan today.

The **fourth cornerstone for my government** within this session is to ensure that Saskatchewan families will benefit from our strong and prosperous economy.

This will take shape in many ways within their communities, rural and urban alike.

Over the last year, business tax reforms were introduced and are making Saskatchewan's corporate tax structure one of the most competitive and business-friendly in Canada, now leading to more job creation and employment opportunities for Saskatchewan people.

Additionally, throughout our province, Aboriginal economic development has significantly contributed to the growing employment numbers among Saskatchewan's First Nations and Métis. To further this progress, a national summit on Aboriginal economic development, in partnership with First Nations, Métis and Inuit, will be held.

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Without a doubt, the rise in the Canadian dollar and changing international markets are having significant impact on two of our major sectors – forestry and the meat industry.

During this session, my government will work with the Forestry Task Force, local communities and industry partners toward a viable and long-term forestry sector in the province. Also during this session, my government will work with the meat industry to evaluate our plans in light of recent changes.

This cornerstone contributes to economic growth. It supports job creation so our young people can build strong futures right here. It provides real benefits for families.

## REAL BENEFITS FOR FAMILIES

My government distinguishes itself by being committed to the conviction that economic progress must result in social progress and that should result in **real benefits for families**.

Saskatchewan families should benefit from their earned success, and their pocketbooks and lifestyles should reflect that growth.

Over the coming months, we will take important steps to make sure life here is even more affordable for every Saskatchewan family.

As part of that, the commitment to the Lowest-Cost Utility Bundle through our Crown Corporations will continue.

### **Real Benefits for Families**

#### ***A Fair Deal for Saskatchewan's Non-Renewable Resources***

My government believes there must be a fair and equitable equalization formula respecting Saskatchewan's non-renewable resource revenues. We are demanding fairness and full benefits for our families when the Government of Canada honours its commitment to the people of Saskatchewan.

During this session, my government will be relentless with vigorous efforts to ensure that the Government of Canada keeps its promise.

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Families will feel real benefits from Saskatchewan's strong economy.

### **Real Benefits for Families** ***Public Infrastructure Renewal***

Families need sturdy, 21st century public infrastructure that meets their growing needs.

Modern transportation corridors are essential to our future economic development and to create opportunities for our young people.

During this session, my government will deliver a multi-year strategy of road and rail, to build a transportation network that will serve the economy of today and tomorrow.

In this session, legislation will be passed to dedicate every dollar of fuel tax collected by the province from motorists toward the maintenance and building of Saskatchewan's road network.

With the opportunity presented by one-time revenues from high energy prices, a multi-year infrastructure fund will be established and will provide funding for initiatives such as

- the Building Communities fund for cultural and recreational facilities;
- improvements to roads affected by heavy-haul traffic;
- improvements to access to First Nations communities; and
- improvements to the economic and social development capacity in our North.

Further to these initiatives, my government will

- expand high-speed internet to more rural and northern communities;
- address barriers to the movement of goods, services, investment and people with our neighbouring provinces and within Canada; and
- work with municipalities to create an "Urban Agenda" to support our cities, communities and regional economies.

Families will feel real benefits from Saskatchewan's strong economy.

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## **Real Benefits for Families**

### ***Safety and Security in our Communities***

My government is committed to a Saskatchewan where families feel safe and secure in their communities.

Toward this goal, as examples, my government will

- create more targeted crime reduction efforts in communities;
- continue action to protect against dangerous offenders;
- develop a province-wide police protocol with the task force for missing persons;
- introduce legislation which gives police new means to combat violence;
- review legislation to ensure that everyone in the province, including those in First Nations communities, has an acceptable level of fire protection and fire prevention services; and
- continue to develop a provincial anti-racism strategy.

## **Real Benefits for Families**

### ***The North***

My government believes in the vast potential and breathtaking beauty of Saskatchewan's North.

Within this session our priorities will include

- working on the Northern Roads to Prosperity strategy;
- moving forward in implementing our commitment to clean up abandoned uranium sites;
- examining the impact of the overtime exemption that currently exists in northern Saskatchewan; and
- maximizing business, training and employment opportunities made possible by high levels of investment in the North.

**Ours is a province with limitless potential:  
down to earth, expanding like the northern sky.**

## **Real Benefits for Families**

### ***Working People, Working Families***

Working people and working families are fundamental building blocks of a strong economy. The health and safety of, and benefits for, workers are important values of my government.

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During this session, my government will

- focus on workplace safety through the response to the Occupational Health and Safety Council Report; and
- receive and respond to the report from the Workers' Compensation Act Committee of Review.

There will be initiatives to assist vulnerable workers to overcome employment challenges by responding further to the recommendations of the Commission on Improving Work Opportunities for Saskatchewan Residents.

As part of our province's commitment to improving working benefits for Saskatchewan people, particularly Saskatchewan young people, the minimum wage will increase to \$7.95 on March 1, 2007, as part of a three-stage increase from \$6.65 just over one year ago.

Families will feel real benefits from Saskatchewan's strong economy.

### **Real Benefits for Families** ***Our Families Who Farm***

Families who farm continue to fill the breadbaskets of the world even as the cost/price squeeze in agriculture continues.

Over the past year, my government has made significant improvements to the education tax on farmland, and today's farm families are gaining from that benefit.

During this session, efforts will ensure that the benefits of our economy continue to touch the lives of average farm families by fully funding the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization Program while negotiating for a more effective and fair national program.

My government will also

- work with industry to improve risk management programs such as Crop Insurance; and
- stand firm in calling for the federal government to announce an effective new disaster program, and to commit to greater support for the grains and oilseeds sector in levelling the international playing field.

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During this session, my government will also press the federal government to honour its own legislation and enable farmers to decide the future of the Canadian Wheat Board through an open and fair plebiscite. The legislature will be asked to endorse that position.

Families will feel real benefits from Saskatchewan's strong economy.

### **Real Benefits for Families** ***Our Volunteers and Our Communities***

Community-based and voluntary organizations are the backbone of the high quality of life Saskatchewan families enjoy. Saskatchewan people volunteer more than any in Canada to sustain their organizations.

Working with the voluntary sector, we are striving to maintain and strengthen our position as a national leader in voluntary participation. My government is deeply disappointed in the decision by the federal government to withdraw support from the Canada Volunteerism Initiative.

As a national leader in voluntary participation, support will continue for the Premier's Voluntary Sector Initiative. My government anticipates moving forward to forge a new structure that will strengthen the relationship between the public sector and the voluntary sector.

All of our efforts are toward the goal of making life better for Saskatchewan families and contributing to a quality of life second to none.

### **Real Benefits for Families** ***A Year of Music – Saskatchewan On Centre Stage***

It is often said that Saskatchewan people are the most creative and the most innovative by nature. My government believes in the strength of creative economies and the enhancements to our quality of life that are brought by innovation and the arts.

In this session, legislation affecting the Status of the Artist will be introduced.

In 2007, we look forward to a year of celebration of the arts, particularly music.

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Building on an impressive track record in establishing a thriving film and video industry, a similar course for the creative economy of music and the arts will be charted.

Working in partnership with SaskCreativeMusic 2007, and having recently secured the world tour of The Rolling Stones, there is no doubt that more excitement is on the way. Saskatchewan has properly reserved its place on centre stage. Events and programs to showcase our own wealth of musical talent will boom.

The 2007 stage has been set for Saskatchewan to play host to

- the Juno Awards in Saskatoon in April;
- the Canadian Country Music Awards in Regina in September; and
- the Western Canadian Music Awards in Moose Jaw in October.

Watch for the marquees and have the welcome mat ready as other announcements unfold. If you love music and good times, Saskatchewan will be the place to be in 2007. **Nobody throws a party like Saskatchewan!** This will be a year to be **proud out loud.**

We know good times, but Saskatchewan people are also known for a strong work ethic. We are amongst the most productive and efficient workforce in this nation. To recognize this, and to further build a healthy balance of work and family, beginning this February, a new annual statutory holiday will be introduced. It will be known as Saskatchewan's "Family Day".

Families will feel real benefits from our strong economy.

Much has been accomplished. My government has set out a clear, focused agenda to benefit families in four cornerstone priority areas. Social progress comes from progress in our economy.

As the provincial motto calls for unification, let us build upon the strength of our many peoples.

**We are building** a province where children, regardless of race or culture, will be able to read the books they carry in their school bags.



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**We are building** a province where young people will establish their careers and raise their families in a healthy environment and with a quality of life second to none.

**We are building** a province where the contributions of our seniors and elders are celebrated with the utmost pride and respected with dignity.

**We are building** a province where no matter if we carry a tool box, a briefcase or a wireless device to work, we have ample leisure time to enjoy our land, our lakes, our skies, our neighbours and most importantly, our families.

**This is our province – a province we are so proud to call home; a province that is down to earth, with only the sky as our limit.**

**This is our home. Saskatchewan!**

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

God bless Saskatchewan. God bless Canada.  
God save the Queen.





