



# A PEOPLE-FIRST RECOVERY

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Saskatchewan's NDP Caucus  
June 2020



A photograph of a young woman with long dark hair and glasses, wearing a black top, smiling and looking towards a man. The man has short brown hair and a beard, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, and is also smiling. They are standing outdoors in front of a stone building with large windows and trees. The word "INTRODUCTION" is overlaid in large white capital letters across the middle of the image.

# INTRODUCTION

**Saskatchewan is blessed with tremendous wealth. Natural wealth that comes from our world-class agricultural land, forests, potash, uranium, oil and gas; and the wealth that comes from the ingenuity, innovation and hard work of Saskatchewan people.**

**We have everything we need for a healthy economy that can weather tough times and take full advantage of good times.**

But even with that wealth, and even before COVID-19, life here was getting harder when it should have been getting better.

Too many families living paycheque to paycheque. Too many people waiting for health care. One in four kids living in poverty. People were already stretched and struggling before the crisis hit.

Unfortunately, the Sask. Party lacks the new ideas to respond to the real challenges brought on by the shutdown of our economy due to COVID-19.

The Sask. Party left our economy reliant on the ups and downs of the natural resource sector. When prices fell, as

economist Joel Bruneau said recently, “We just didn’t have the cylinders going to pick up that slack.”

And we’ve seen before what the Sask. Party does when times get tough: cuts and privatization, and tax hikes for ordinary families. We saw this in 2017 with the cuts to health and education, the PST expansion and the sell-off of STC.

We know that more of the same is coming, if they’re given the chance.

To rebuild a healthy economy, we need to make different choices. Cuts are the wrong way forward and will do real damage to an economy that was already in recession before COVID-19.

Instead, we need to invest in people, strengthen local businesses and create opportunities for new industries.

That means infrastructure spending that invests in local companies and workers. It means supporting small businesses, creative industries and women-dominated fields in the public sector. It means putting people first.

Saskatchewan has led the way before. We have pioneered creative solutions like public healthcare and strong Crown corporations to build a healthy society and protect our economic independence. We can lead again. But it will take new ideas. It will take all of us working together, not stoking divisions for narrow political gain.

This document is an invitation to a conversation with the people of Saskatchewan about those new ideas, about a path forward from our current challenges.

Over the coming months we will be engaging people across our province and leaders from across Canada on these ideas, asking for their input.

By putting people first, growing local, and focusing on the future, we can build an economy that brings us out of this challenging time stronger.

Together, we can build a healthy society, a province where we all share in the benefits of our prosperity, powered by an economy that works for people and keeps people working.

**“Saskatchewan has led the way before. We have pioneered creative solutions like public healthcare and strong Crown corporations to build a healthy society and protect our economic independence.”**







# Part One PEOPLE FIRST

**When we put people first, everyone does better. Putting people first means investing in people, ensuring stronger Crowns, and building an economy that works for everyone.**

## **Investing in People**

The past months have reminded us what really matters: our health, our families, our connection with the communities we live in.

It's our strong communities that make Saskatchewan such a great place to live. But for too long, the current government has cut the very things that keep communities strong. Those cuts have long-term implications.

For every dollar invested in services for families – education from early childhood to job training, health and wellbeing, housing – we get nearly two dollars back in economic growth and six to ten dollars in savings on health care, social services, and justice in the years ahead.

These investments more than pay for themselves, as government revenues grow when people get and keep better jobs.

COVID-19 has also reminded us of how much we rely on those who care for young people and seniors, and that we must value both the work of caring for others, and the workers who do these jobs.

We are too often presented with a false choice between economic and social well-being. When we invest in people, we build an economy that's more resilient in tough times and better able to take full advantage of opportunities when times are good.

**“For every dollar invested in services for families...we get nearly two dollars back in economic growth.”**

Now is the time to invest, not to cut. So many of our communities are strong and healthy because of Saskatchewan's strong



public sector. Crown workers, teachers, nurses spend money in our communities, helping to keep people and the private sector strong and healthy.

We'll invest in the people of Saskatchewan by:

- Reducing the need for residential seniors care by creating the best home care system in Canada while improving standards in long-term care.
- Ending hallway medicine, delivering better preventative care, and reducing wait times. This includes investing in public health, cut repeatedly by this government.
- Investing in dedicated mental health and addiction emergency rooms so that no one is turned away at a time of crisis.
- Addressing class size and composition and ensuring no child in K-3 goes to school in a class of more than 24 kids.
- Greatly expanding access to affordable high-quality childcare and early childhood education, a measure that would allow more women to enter the workforce.
- Working with the federal government and First Nations and Métis governments to close the gap in employment, education, justice, and health between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Saskatchewan.
- Continuing to fight for a national pharmacare program to reduce drug costs for Saskatchewan patients.
- Ensuring that skills training and English as an additional language training are available for new Canadians to help them put down roots and make Saskatchewan home for the long term.





## Stronger Crowns

We are rightly proud of our Crown corporations, and not just for the services they provide.

They are drivers of innovation, good employers, important sources of revenue, and strong pillars of a healthy, diversified economy. The pandemic has only highlighted the value of owning our own utilities, as it allowed us to offer deferral payments and other supports for ratepayers.

But the Sask. Party has undermined our Crowns at every turn, with outsourcing, shutdowns and sell-offs. Given another mandate, it's clear, they'll try to dig their way out of the mess they've created by selling off and shutting down the Crowns we built over generations.

An NDP government would not just protect our Crowns, but strengthen them.

We can leverage our Crowns to create good jobs, make life affordable and build up our economic independence by:

- Using our Renew Saskatchewan plan to lower bills and create jobs as we move to cleaner energy.
- Leveraging the strength of SaskTel and SaskPower to make Saskatchewan the home of cloud storage, supporting a growing tech industry.
- Cutting SGI rates and ensuring we deliver the lowest auto insurance premiums in the country.
- Developing a business case for SaskPharm, a generic pharmaceutical Crown corporation, to lower drug costs, produce essential medicines and vaccines in Saskatchewan, and foster innovation.
- Stopping the practice of outsourcing and ensuring our Crowns adhere to our Sask First procurement model.







## An Economy that Works for Everyone

Growing inequality and poverty hurt people and hamstring economic growth. Poverty costs the Saskatchewan economy \$4 billion dollars a year in decreased economic productivity and increased public spending on social services, justice, and health costs, on top of the enormous human impacts for families.

We all do better when everyone shares in our success. Reducing poverty and creating brighter futures for more of our citizens means more people spending money in local businesses. It means less crime, lower health care costs, more skilled workers, and improved social integration. It fosters a happier, healthier, and more prosperous society.

We can build an economy that works for everyone by:

- Implementing a poverty reduction strategy to address the fact that one in four Saskatchewan children live in poverty. Saskatchewan is the only province without a poverty reduction strategy.
- Reversing interprovincial out-migration by supporting integration and re-introducing the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program family class.
- Helping people get off social assistance by ending claw-backs and enhancing supports for those moving to full employment.
- Protecting people against predatory lending through a cap on fees and interest rates, a cap on cheque cashing fees, and working with lenders to support accessible, fair, affordable lending.





# Part Two

# GROW LOCAL

**Successful economies grow from the roots up. When local businesses thrive, the economy as a whole thrives, with good jobs, good incomes, quality education and an improved quality of life for all.**

## **Putting Saskatchewan Companies and Workers First**

When we build our roads, our hospitals, our schools, and our power plants – with our public dollars – it should be our companies and our workers doing the work. That way, more of our money stays in the province, as those companies and workers spend what they earn locally, and pay taxes locally, allowing us to build more schools, roads and hospitals.

Saskatchewan is home to hundreds of construction companies capable of taking on everything from a basement renovation to a major infrastructure project. Local companies like these care about more than the contract — they know the final product is something they and their families will use for generations, and they take pride in the quality of the work.

Every single one of the ten biggest infrastructure projects in the last ten years went to companies with head offices outside of Saskatchewan. That's more than \$6.3 billion of public spending the Sask. Party shipped out of province. Many have been unreliable and expensive P3 projects, like the Saskatchewan Hospital in North Battleford where the entire roof has needed replacing within months of opening. And just this spring, we learned that the Moose Jaw power plant contract will go to an out-of-country company.

Promises of more capital spending from the Sask. Party mean more expensive failures like the Regina Bypass and the GTH, and more money going to companies outside Saskatchewan.



We can build up Saskatchewan companies and workers by:

- Introducing Sask-First procurement to ensure that we choose the company that delivers the most value overall—not just the best price, but the best quality and the most local economic activity.
- Addressing the growing infrastructure deficit in our province by investing in schools, health care facilities, roads, highways and energy projects.
- Supporting Indigenous companies and setting targets for First Nations, Métis and others at higher risk of unemployment through Crown and government procurement.
- Eliminating the PST on construction labour, stimulating the struggling construction industry and making life more affordable for families building or renovating their homes.
- Helping young farmers get a start, including making crop insurance premiums more affordable for producers in their first years of farming.
- Working with small businesses and industry representatives on a province-wide, “Buy Saskatchewan” campaign, including a Sask. First certification program for businesses and organizations that buy local.
- Restoring funding to local economic development initiatives — something that exists in every other province but has been eliminated under the Sask. Party — and restoring the small business loan programs cancelled by the Sask. Party.

**“We need to capture more value from the things we produce here at home.”**

## Adding Value

We have always been a province of primary producers, with a need to get our products to market. Saskatchewan’s economy is among the most export dependent of all Canadian provinces, with over two thirds of our annual GDP coming from exports.

To succeed, we need to continue to develop and diversify our export markets, and expand and enrich our trading relationships. This means we need to embrace trade, not shun it, as is happening in some parts of the world. The separatist rhetoric Premier Moe refuses to condemn puts access to those markets at risk and threatens our trading relationships.

By welcoming immigrants to our province, we can grow our economy, build goodwill with our trading partners, and enrich our communities with families looking to put down roots.

The COVID-19 and oil price crises of 2020 have again revealed how vulnerable we are to forces beyond our control. In addition to helping our companies compete in export markets, we need to capture more value from the things we produce here at home.

As just one example, Saskatchewan produces some of the best craft beer in Canada: from the barley and the hops in the field to the pint glass in your hand, every link in that value chain — the profit, the jobs — stays right here in Saskatchewan.



We can add value by:

- Expanding supports for value-added agri-food sectors like canola crushing, plant proteins, and manufacturing.
- Increasing food production and processing here in Saskatchewan, including abattoirs and greenhouses.
- Strengthening the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership to help entrepreneurs promote their products and services in new and diverse markets.
- Expanding and improving the transportation infrastructure needed to get our mining, energy, agri-food, forestry and manufacturing products to market.
- Helping our companies and entrepreneurs succeed by supporting innovation, access to capital, and market access in Saskatchewan, across Canada and around the world.

**“Almost half of Saskatchewan people expect to take on more debt this year just to get by.”**





## Good Jobs and Fair Work

Too many people in our province are out of work today. Those lucky enough to have a job are worried about how their family will get by if they lose it.

Almost half of Saskatchewan people expect to take on more debt this year just to get by. Bankruptcies and foreclosures are on the rise.

After a decade of failing to build the resilience we need to endure downturns in the natural resource sector, it's time for action to build an economy that works for people and keeps people working.

We can support good jobs and fair work by:

- Raising the minimum wage to \$15/hr so all workers can support themselves and their families. Minimum wage workers are disproportionately women.
- Introducing pay equity legislation to ensure equal pay for equal work.
- Unleashing the full potential of our cultural industries – including working with industry leaders on a new film employment tax credit.
- Implementing a program to support small businesses to protect and sustain jobs.
- Restoring balance to labour legislation to ensure workers are able to join unions, achieve safe workplaces and get fair contracts from employers.
- Introducing provisions for 10 paid sick days, a long-overdue workplace standard.
- Helping workers train and retrain to keep up with a changing world of work.
- Working with leaders in the business community to expand the number of woman-owned businesses.







# Part Three

# FUTURE FOCUS

**The world is changing faster than ever. COVID-19 will only speed up that change. Our success in this changing world depends on our ability to respond, adapt, and innovate.**

**For business, governments, workers and students alike, this means tapping into our creativity and ingenuity to make innovation the core of our culture once again.**

## **Reconnect Saskatchewan**

Saskatchewan people are spread out across a huge province. We are connected to each other in so many ways, but to thrive, we depend on our shared infrastructure to reach each other and connect with the rest of the world.

Our Crowns have led the way in keeping us connected, with SaskTel providing telecommunications service to rural Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Transportation Company (STC) taking passengers and freight to all corners of the province.

Instead of understanding the importance of the Saskatchewan Transportation Company, the Sask. Party shut it down

outright. This short-sighted decision to abandon rural Saskatchewan stranded seniors and students, and left farmers losing days in the field because they can't get parts or have to drive a loved one to the city for a medical appointment.

The Sask. Party has undermined SaskTel, limiting its growth outside the province and contracting-out key services instead of building.

As a result, our rural Internet and cell service have not kept pace with the needs of today's rural residents, farmers and business owners. COVID-19 highlighted more than ever how Internet and cell must now be treated as an essential service.



We can reconnect Saskatchewan by:

- Investing in high-speed Internet and quality cell service everywhere in the province. This will facilitate business through e-commerce and precision agriculture and improve the quality of life in rural Saskatchewan.
  - Establishing a new STC with high-quality freight and passenger services, allowing for affordable travel and transport in a new energy-efficient fleet.
  - Using expanded SaskTel capability and our tech sector to keep rural homes and property safe with SecurTek protection for rural homes and out-buildings.
  - Working with SaskPower to establish electric vehicle super-charging stations along major routes for private and commercial vehicle owners and the new STC.
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## Renew Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan is the sunniest place in Canada. We have incredible opportunities in solar, wind, geothermal and energy conservation.

But instead of leading the way in renewable energy, Saskatchewan lags far behind the rest of the country and much of the world. By failing to develop a made-in-Saskatchewan climate strategy, the Sask. Party has left us with a patchwork of insufficient policies that are creating economic uncertainty and driving away investments.

It's time for Saskatchewan to lead. We can renew Saskatchewan's energy mix and act on climate change for future generations by:

- Harnessing our wind and solar resources to produce clean electricity and future-proof our economy.
- Empowering homeowners, businesses, municipalities and First Nations to be part of the solution by providing up-front, on-bill financing for clean energy installations and retrofits.
- Investing in natural climate solutions such as wetland and habitat restoration, and in critical water infrastructure to mitigate flood and drought risk.
- Replacing our coal-fired electricity that will be phased out by 2030 with reliable renewable energy.
- Setting aggressive energy efficiency targets and funding retrofits to reduce energy use by 2% annually, saving Saskatchewan families, businesses, municipalities and First Nation communities millions of dollars.



## Re-Imagine Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan researchers and business leaders have been early adopters and agents of change. From the invention of canola in the 1970s to the advent of zero-till in more recent years, we've been at the forefront of innovation.

Today, that investment in innovation lags far behind other provinces. The Sask. Party has taken millions out of the post-secondary sector, a 4% cut since 2016 despite thousands more students who want to be the entrepreneurs and innovators of the future. The Conference Board of Canada ranks Saskatchewan at the bottom of the pack in innovation, behind every province but PEI and New Brunswick.

To lead in adaptation and innovation, we need to invest in the programs that allow us to advance in research and development. To ensure accessible, high-quality opportunities, tuition needs to be affordable, and professors and researchers need adequate resources to find solutions to emerging problems.

We can embrace innovation by:

- Stopping the cuts to post-secondary education and encouraging young people to pursue higher education, starting by eliminating interest on student loans.
- Expanding research partnerships at our universities and colleges to find innovative solutions to the challenges of the future, and increasing enrollment in Sask Polytech's ICT programs, which boast a 96% employment rate and a year-and-a-half waiting list.
- Rebuilding the successful NORTEP program and working with First Nations and Métis communities to increase opportunities for higher education and training.
- Providing marketing support for Saskatchewan companies to attract talent from other parts of the world while promoting our products and services to the world market.
- Improving training to promote the highly educated workforce Saskatchewan companies need, particularly in the tech sector.
- Working with credit unions and local banks to improve access to capital for start-ups.





# CONCLUSION

Saskatchewan is at a crossroads, facing a choice between shortsighted cuts and privatization, or long-term success through investment in people.

A choice between more of the same, or a new path to shared prosperity.

COVID-19 has made these choices even more stark. We face serious economic challenges, and the strain from cuts to our public services make them all the more daunting.

We will only get through this by choosing to work together and invest in our future.

The most irresponsible and costly thing a government could do in a moment like this would be to shy away from the current challenge, cut the services people depend upon, and run on hopes of a return to the status quo, while we watch our infrastructure continue to crumble and the economy continue to stagnate.

As usual, the Sask Party is thinking about the next election when we need to be thinking about the next generation. They cut deeply after the last election to cover their mismanagement. They hurt Saskatchewan people and weakened our economic recovery, and they'll do it again if given the chance.

The evidence is clear: wise investments in people pay for themselves over time in increased economic activity and decreased spending on poverty, illness and crime. We can't afford to shortchange future generations by cutting and running at a time like this.

With forward-thinking investments, smart financing, a commitment to progressive taxation and fair return on natural resources, we can afford to put people first. Truth is, we can't afford not to. The choices we make today will shape our options for a generation.

Let's choose to put people first.



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