



PREMIER OF SASKATCHEWAN

**LEGISLATIVE BUILDING
REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN
S4S 0B3**

**SARM Address
Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities
Queensbury Downs Convention Centre
Regina, Saskatchewan
Wednesday, March 10, 2010**

President David Marit,

Members of the Executive of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities,

Delegates to the 2010 Annual Convention,

Cabinet and caucus colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for your invitation to speak to you today.

A few quick items of business before I begin my remarks...

I understand that just yesterday, delegates to this convention passed a resolution in favour of four-year terms.

In this, you are proposing a formula similar to one adopted by our sister organization, the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association.

We were happy to move in an expeditious manner upon receiving their request.

So, this morning, I am pleased to announce that we will work with equal haste when it comes to your request regarding four year terms.

On a second issue, your membership and board of directors has made moving forward with a new office building in Regina a priority. One possible location under discussion was a parking lot near the current SARM office in Regina.

That property is currently owned by SaskPower.

Bill Boyd and Dave Marit had a preliminary discussion on this issue a few days back.

As you can imagine, given the men involved, this was a blunt discussion.

I'm pleased to report it ended happily.

And in true Saskatchewan fashion, it ended with a handshake.

So, I am pleased to tell you that I have directed my staff and SaskPower to sit down and work-out the details so this project can proceed.

I'll begin this morning with a rhetorical question;

When it comes to dealing effectively with rural Saskatchewan, does it really matter where members of the government happen to live?

Does it matter if the agriculture minister has a permit book?

The answer, of course, is no.

The measure you will use to determine whether you are being well-served is simply this:

Action.

Not words.

Not promises.

But action.

That being said, our government benefits from having many people who have a solid understanding of rural Saskatchewan and a close connection to farm families.

Women and men like Ken Krawetz, Bill Boyd, Rod, June Draude, Bob Bjornerud.

People like Jim Reiter, former Director on the board of this very organization and a representative on your Audit Committee, the Wilkinson Foundation, the Lt. Governor's Award Committee and the Municipal-Provincial round table.

People like Wayne Elhard, a partner in a farming operation and a man who was in the farm machinery business for 20 years.

Laura Ross, born and raised on a farm near Yorkton.

Tim McMillan, who grew up on a family farm near Loydminster and is still active.

Doreen Eagles, Dennis Allchurch, Fred Bradshaw, all with extensive farm backgrounds.

Mike Chisholm, born and raised on a farm near Maidstone, studied Agricultural Plant Science.

The Chisholm family farm is now in its fourth generation.

Nadine Wilson, who is still active in farming and was twice elected Reeve of the Municipality of Paddockwood, and former President of her local municipal association.

Glen Hart, extensive farming background and a councilor for the RM of Cupar.

Greg Brkich, born and raised on the family farm northwest of Bladworth and still operating a cattle and grain operation.

Speaker Don Toth, still active on the family farm near Langbank and who served on the RM Council of Silverwood.

(Ken Cheveldayoff, Rob Norris and Bill Hutchinson---they've driven past farms. Serge was arrested on a farm....in Quebec.

I'm glad we have all of this experience.

I'm glad we have these roots in our government.

I'm glad we have strong voices, voices with credibility.

The experience, the wisdom and the judgment are all good things.

But they don't count for much unless the strong voices are heard, the experience is appreciated and the wisdom is heeded.

This is what's most important.

The fact that these men and women have, on every occasion, have raised their voices on behalf of rural Saskatchewan.

I'm comforted by the fact that we, as a government, have a good track record when it comes to rural Saskatchewan.

I think most of the time, we get it.

Witness our \$71 million in support for cattle and hog producers.

Witness our Saskatchewan Agricultural Land Sales Program, which puts crown land back into the hands of producers---the most effective stewards of that land.

The Gopher Control Rebate Program—a 50 per cent rebate to producers and RM's on eligible gopher control products.

Witness the improvements we have made to crop insurance.

The cost-sharing program for water infrastructure.

Moving AgriStability to Saskatchewan.

We have also heard your concerns about rural health care.

That's why we expanded enrollment in the U of S College of Medicine, because it's easier to keep doctors who graduate in Saskatchewan. (60- 100 84)

We're on track to meet our commitment of increasing enrollment to 100 undergraduate seats and 120 residency positions by next year.

We listened carefully to your concerns and just under a year ago, we released a new, comprehensive Physician Recruitment Strategy.

And we established a Physician Recruitment Agency.

And that is why there has been an increase---not a decrease---but an increase in the number of doctors working in Saskatchewan.

72 more GP's and 92 more specialists---an overall increase of 164 doctors since March of 2007.

That's action speaking louder than words.

According to the national agency responsible for tracking the number of physicians, Saskatchewan is well above the national average in terms of doctors per capita and specialists per capital.

In terms of nurse retention rates, we have gone from the worst rate in Canada a few years back, to the best retention rate in Canada.

In terms of long term care, we're looking at some new, innovative partnerships with religious organizations and CBO's.

And rural Saskatchewan is once again the home of innovation in health care.

The Five Hills Rural Health Authority for example, has the lowest costs for long term care in all of Saskatchewan.

Instead of putting people directly into a home they have chosen instead to beef-up home care supports.

It's less expensive than the \$50,000 annual cost of a long term bed and the seniors are much happier because they get to stay in their own homes.

Our government understands rural Saskatchewan in a way that our political opponents may not.

On rural issues, we are taking action.

For example, we introduced a bounty on coyotes.

I, for one, remember the story from a few years back (December 28, 2005) when a coyote started biting a six-year-old girl's ski pants while she and her older sister were waiting for a school bus, just outside of White City.

The older sister was able to scare the coyote off by screaming and pushing it away.

And because we listen to you, our government doesn't put much stock in the new Facebook site titled "Stop Brad Wall from Killing Coyotes."

A site many members of the NDP caucus and staff have signed on to, including the Opposition's Director of Communications.

(price of fur dropping, had to take action to raise it. No one wants to kill coyotes, but something had to be done)

As an aside, the coyote bounty program has not been without criticism from those who support the concept.

We've heard from a disgruntled rancher near my home in Swift Current.

He's made because he can't claim a bounty on a coyote he shot.

It only had three legs.

We are working hard to do a better job representing rural Saskatchewan.

I hope you agree.

Because I want you to remember that, on March 24th, when our new budget is released.

Money is going to be tight.

Some difficult decisions will have to be made, and you may not like some of what's contained in the budget.

And this is not because of potash revenues.

In the past ten years, we have seen a doubling in government spending.

Growth in the public service has more than outstripped growth in our population.

We think it's time to start reducing the footprint of government.

We think it's time, through attrition, to start controlling growth in the public service.

We think it's time to start working smarter, not spending more.

We will begin charting a different course for Saskatchewan, and we think that different course reflects your values.

Values that embrace prudence.

Values that embrace efficiency.

Values that embrace honest, hard work.

Values that embrace a forward-looking optimism.

We are aiming to hold the line on spending in most ministries.

--property tax revenue sharing.

Rest assured, as I told SUMA, we are not done with property taxes.

The first year, 153 million

Another 53 million to fully implement our plan.

We will continue meeting our platform commitments in the timeframe outlined during the election.

We remain committed to improving roads, hospitals, schools—infrastructure critical to continued growth in rural Saskatchewan.

Improving the communications infrastructure is also key to sustaining growth.

That's why I'm pleased to announce today that SaskTel is investing another \$48 million in continuing its Rural Infrastructure Program this year.

The goal of 100 per cent high speed internet coverage in Saskatchewan will be a reality within months.

And it's not just high speed.

Part of that \$48 million---\$17 million in fact, has been earmarked for expanding and improving the cell phone network in rural Saskatchewan.

This means 55 brand new digital cellular sites in our province.

So, does it really matter where the Premier of Saskatchewan is from?

Does it really matter whether a government understands rural life?

Perhaps not.

But I'm glad we do.

It helps us embrace policies and methods that actually work, not just measures that are good in theory.

We're going to keep trying to do better than the talk show expert I read about recently, who received a call from a woman listener.

This woman was looking for a way to get rid of a skunk under her porch.

The expert said a trail of crumbs from the porch out to the garden would work.

The skunk would follow the trail out.

Now that woman has two skunks under her porch.

L and G we are going to do what we can to use common sense in the months and years ahead, and keep those skunks from under the porch.