

# A CENTURY OF **ENTERPRISE**



SASKATCHEWAN'S VOICE OF BUSINESS  
CELEBRATES 100 YEARS



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ABEX Awards

Saskatchewan Business Hall of Fame

Opposite: 1976 Annual General Meeting



**SPEAK OUT-  
FOR BUSINESS**



## CHAPTER ONE

# The 'Voice of Business' is Born: The 1920s

The Roaring Twenties were aptly named, as the industrialized nations raced to build a new world out of the ashes of the First World War. Saskatchewan was no different as farmers and business owners seized the opportunity to create new companies and organizations to represent them. So it was that a couple of dozen businessmen met in Regina on July 21, 1920 to form what would later become the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce.







McCallum Hill Building, circa 1924.

#### ISSUES OF THE DAY:

- Immediate completion of the Hudson Bay Railway
- Changing the classification of wheat grades from "Manitoba" to "Canadian Western" under the Canada Grain Act
- Opposing the proposed 30% increase in railway freight rates
- Replacing the "Business Profits War Tax" by a three per cent sales or "turn over" tax to be applied to consumer goods. Sales tax revenues could then be used to increase exemptions from income taxes for individuals and families, not unlike how the GST was implemented by the Mulroney Conservative government in 1991 – 70 years later!
- Standard weight of bread. A standard loaf ranged from 16 ounces in Swift Current, to 20 ounces in Prince Albert and Regina

On July 21, 1920, 26 delegates representing 16 boards of trade from across the southern half of the province gathered at the Regina Board of Trade office at the McCallum-Hill Building, Regina's first skyscraper.

Following the call to order by temporary chairman, L.T. McDonald of Regina, a welcoming address by Regina Mayor James Grassick and the reading of minutes from a meeting in Calgary on May 17, 1920, by temporary secretary Gerald Graham of Saskatoon, the delegates voted to form the Saskatchewan Associated Boards of Trade.

In so doing, they would lay the foundation for an organization that would dominate Saskatchewan's business scene like the 10-storey office building they were meeting in dominated Regina's skyline.

In fact, the organization that would later become the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce has outlived its birthplace by 38 years. While the McCallum-Hill Building was demolished in 1982, the chamber is still going strong, 100 years later!

Of course, much has changed since that historic day a century ago. All 26 delegates

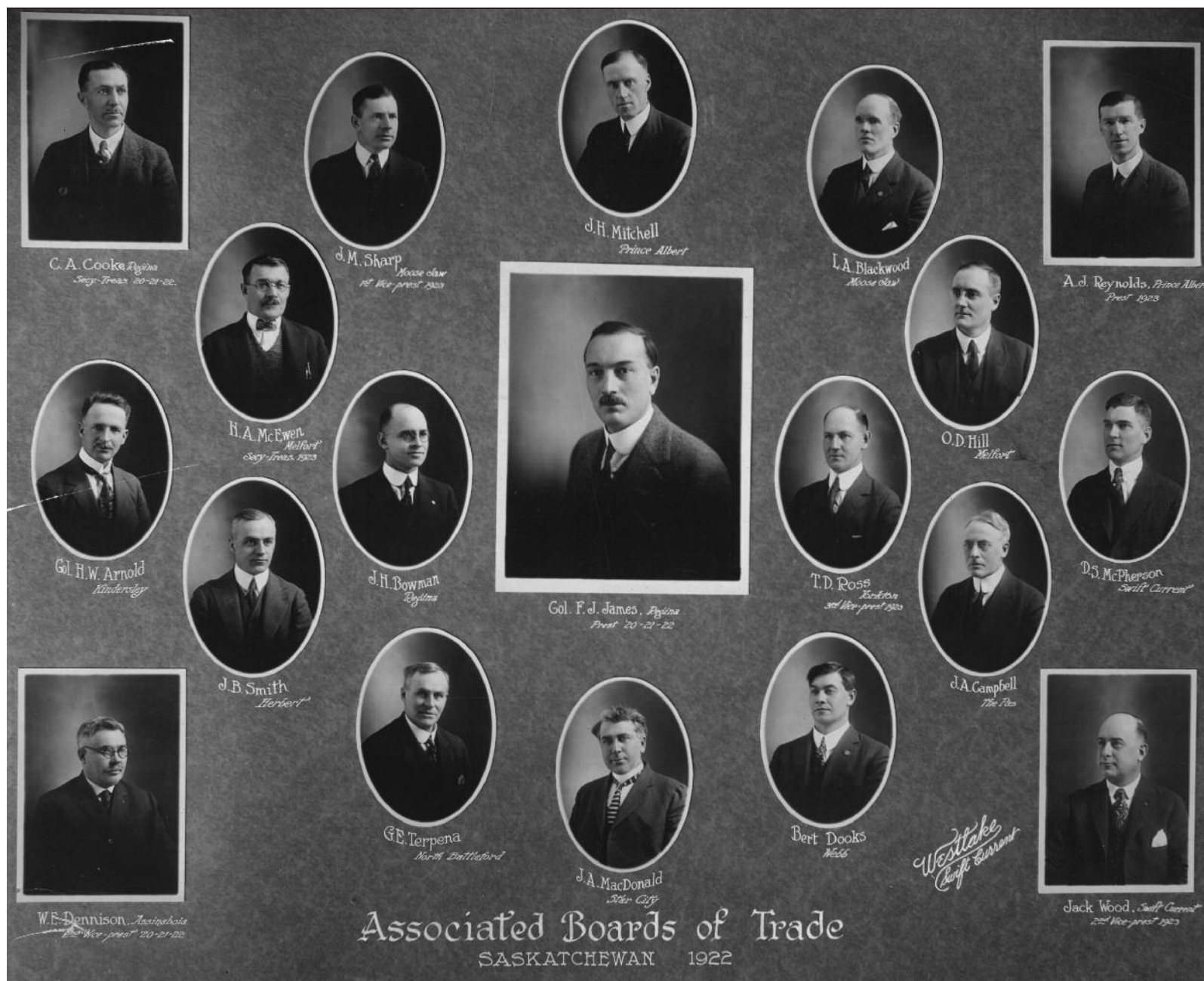
were men, representing mainly small businesses in communities from Swift Current in the southwest, Yorkton in the southeast, Kindersley in the west-central region, Assiniboia in the south-central and Prince Albert in the north.

During this decade, the province's population had grown exponentially, from a few thousand in 1885 to 91,300 by 1901, then skyrocketed to 921,000 by 1931, largely on the strength of the booming wheat economy.

At that time, nearly 80 per cent of the province's population lived in rural areas, and nearly 90 per cent of those rural residents lived on farms. Urban dwellers – the one in five people living in towns or cities of 1,000 population or more – undoubtedly knew what side of the bread their butter was on.

In fact, the preamble to the constitution of the Saskatchewan Associated Boards of Trade clearly stated the importance of agriculture to the economy.

"The objects of the Saskatchewan Associated Boards of Trade shall be to promote the commercial, industrial,







economic and civic welfare of the members of the association and of the province of Saskatchewan, to urge for the development of its natural resources, to *forward agricultural development.*"

So really it should come as no surprise that Saskatchewan's first province-wide business organization should be primarily concerned with agricultural issues.

Along with the booming agricultural sector, Saskatchewan's small business sector had grown from a few hundred at the turn of the century to several thousand in just three decades. According to the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Saskatchewan had 10,841 stores with sales of more than \$189 million in 1930.

It should also come as no surprise that men dominated the small business sector, as

fully 95 per cent of business proprietors were male. Women, who made up one-fifth of the small business workforce, owned less than one in 20 small businesses.

All these demographic trends – the province's predominately rural population, the predominance of agriculture in the provincial economy, the male dominance of the business sector and the relative underrepresentation of women in business, either as workers and more particularly as owners – would change dramatically over the next 100 years.

And the chamber would change with the times. But in 1920, the Saskatchewan Associated Boards of Trade – like the businesses it represented – was very much a "man's world."

After agreeing to form the Saskatchewan Associated Boards of Trade, the delegates



elected a president, first and second vice-presidents and an executive committee of eight members. Since the secretary-treasurer was deemed to be most important position, secretary Graham was elected first.

And since both secretary-treasurer and president should come from the same community during the first year at least, given "the need to be constantly in touch with each other," Thomas Reynolds of Saskatoon was elected president.

Major F. J. James of Regina was elected first vice-president; C. Clare of Prince Albert, second vice-present; and W.E. Dennison of Assiniboia, third vice-president.

Besides drafting a constitution and bylaws and developing a "program of work," the fledgling association had to elect a new president at its Nov. 27, 1920 meeting in

**Top left: University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon 1930s**

**Top right: Regina Warehouse District, 1920s**



Francis John James, Saskatchewan Association of Boards of Trade, 1920-1923

Regina, following the sudden and unexpected resignation of Thomas Reynolds.

Francis John James was a native of London, England, who came to Regina in 1907 and established an investment brokerage and insurance firm, Nay & James, until his business career was interrupted by the Great War. Captain of a reserve unit in the Canadian Army Service Corps (CASC), which provided transportation services and supplies to the army, James volunteered for active duty in July 1915, at the age of 38.

Promoted to the rank of major that same year, James served at various locations and in various capacities in England and France. After four years of service, for which he was commended by the Secretary of State for War for valuable services rendered, James was demobilized in July 1919 and returned to Regina to rejoin his wife, Christina, and resume his career.

A natural leader, James was soon thrust into a leadership role with the association and other organizations, including the Regina Exhibition Association and Saskatchewan Association of Music Festivals. And James was up to challenge, serving three stints as the SABT president until stepping aside in 1923.

James rightly believed that a business organization needed to be moderate, sensible, pragmatic and reasonable in its demands and thereby earn the respect and, hopefully, the ear of government. Over the

**“As a business organization, we must maintain a level head, and when we make statements we must be prepared to back them up with irrefutable evidence. The world at large is calling for broader views... We must tread carefully, and by so doing, our demands, when made upon governments and corporations, will be treated with respect and granted careful consideration.”**

Francis John James, Saskatchewan Association Boards of Trade, 1920-1923

years, the chamber has, for the most part, followed James's sage advice.

While it had its successes, seven and half months after its conception, the fledgling association was still operating on a shoe-string. As Graham noted in his annual report to delegates, the purpose of forming the association was to “provide a common council for the various boards of trade of the province where they might meet and discuss problems and co-operate for their solution.

“Without an income of several thousand dollars per year, it would be impossible to establish an efficient propagandist agency such as an ideal organization of this kind should be. No serious attempt has yet been made to create such an organization, although there are those who think a provincial chamber of commerce a possibility.”

On June 1, 1921, the executive committee met at the Moose Jaw Board of Trade offices to, among other things, appoint A.L. Haining of Saskatoon as acting secretary to fill in for Graham, who was unable to continue as secretary-treasurer.

Unfortunately, by the next meeting on Nov. 25, 1921, Haining had died, necessitating the appointment of a third secretary-treasurer, C.A. Cooke of Regina. Cooke would continue to serve as secretary to the end of 1922.

The second annual general meeting was held on March 15-16, 1922, in Prince Albert attracting 36 delegates to discuss the issues of the day and debate a wide range of resolutions.

In an address “tinged with a sentiment of optimism,” president James spoke to delegates about the state of the association and the “general financial and industrial situation.” “(T)he president spoke very encouragingly of the outlook, but impressed on the meeting the need for careful consideration and economy,”

secretary Cooke said in his report of the annual meeting.

Following his speech, delegates applauded James and called on him to serve another term as president. While James asked to be relieved of his duties, saying "the honours should be passed around," the delegates moved nominations close. "The re-election of Major James was greeted with loud applause and expressions of satisfaction," the annual report said.

Resolutions calling for the "re-establishment of a wheat board in Canada," reinstatement of the Crow's Nest Pass freight rate agreement (which had been suspended for three years), as well as several previous resolutions dealing with the Hudson Bay Railway and wheat nomenclature, were also passed by delegates.

One of the highlights of the association's second full year of operation was a meeting with Premier Charles Dunning at the Legislative Building in Regina on May 26, 1922. A successful businessman and former provincial treasurer under Premier William Martin, who later succeeded Martin as premier in 1921, Dunning proved to be a good listener and well-informed host.

The association's third annual general meeting took place March 7-8, 1923 in Swift Current with 20 delegates in attendance. In his last address as president, (now Colonel) James recounted some of the accomplishments of the organization in the previous year.

First, he noted "great progress" had been made in obtaining the province's support in calling for "equitable freight rates," adding the province had placed its freight rate expert at the association's disposal to this end.

Secondly, the association's push for completion of the Hudson Bay Railway gained momentum, despite opposition from Eastern Canadian interests, notably the existing railroad companies.

"The East may rail at us, calling us 'silly billies,' 'bigoted fanatics' and some other fancy names which have appeared in the Eastern press, but that will not deter us from our purpose."

James said opening up another route for grain from Winnipeg to Churchill, MB., via Hudson Bay, SK., is a "feasible proposition" that will "ease the burden of our sorely tried farmers" and benefit, not just Western Canada, but the whole country.

"I do not believe that the operation of this road will injuriously affect our existing channels of distribution," he told delegates. "There will be plenty of business for all existing railroads in Canada and Hudson's Bay Railway too."

Finally, James said, as "my endeavours as president are about to end," that the association was "strong numerically, sound financially and has a reputation

throughout the West for exercising caution and moderation in its deliberations and official actions."

"The Saskatchewan Association of Boards of Trade will, I trust, go on from year to year, increasing its usefulness to its membership, thereby aiding in the development of this wonderful province of Saskatchewan, of which we are so justly proud."

While James was right about the association's reputation, he was wrong about its future, at least in the short term.

A.J. Reynolds of Prince Albert succeeded James as president at the 1923 annual general meeting and executive committee meetings were held in Regina and Saskatoon that year.

But the annual meeting in Moose Jaw on Feb. 26, 1924, which drew only 17 delegates, would be the last annual meeting for the Saskatchewan Association of Boards of Trade for more than 20 years.

The Stock Market Crash of 1929, the Great Depression of the 1930 and the Second World War would all intervene before the association would be built up again.



Premier Charles Dunning



Saskatchewan Legislative Building, 1920s



## CHAPTER TWO

# Rebirth and Boom: The 1940s and '50s

The end of the Dirty Thirties and the Second World War ushered in a new economic era in Saskatchewan, with the return of servicemen from the war and the resulting baby boom, which dramatically increased demand for housing, workers and consumer goods and services.





Old Standard Motors Building 1950s

#### ISSUES OF THE DAY:

- Urge the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation government to define its policy on the status of free enterprise in the province
- Construction of irrigation projects including the South Saskatchewan River Irrigation Scheme
- Diversifying the farming industry
- Government-owned revenue producing enterprises to be subject to municipal taxes
- Advocating for a 44 hour work week
- Advocating against a 30% increase in freight-rates
- Approving Daylight Saving Time
- Uniform closing hours for retail businesses
- Natural gas distribution
- Highways
- Tourist accommodation

After two decades in a state of suspended animation, the province's 85 boards of trade decided 1945 was an "opportune time" for the association to resurrect itself.

Just as there were many factors that led to the dissolution of the Saskatchewan Association of Boards of Trade in 1925, there were many reasons why the province's boards of trade decided to give it another go 20 years later.

First, the Depression and the Second World War were finally over and business owners, who had struggled through the economic devastation of the 1930s and the war economy of the 1940s, were looking forward to a return to normalcy.

After years of war rationing and a decade of drought and deprivation during the Dirty Thirties, there was pent-up demand for consumer goods, new housing and vehicles, as thousands of servicemen were coming home and going back to work.

Also, during those two decades, the economy of the province was changing from a predominately agricultural producer of grains and livestock to a more diverse industrial and resource-based economy.

As University of Saskatchewan economist Peter Phillips noted in *The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan*: "By 1929, Saskatchewan had a vibrant developing economy," but one focused on primary and secondary production of agricultural commodities.

Economic development followed a decision in 1930 by the federal government to transfer ownership and control of the land and its resources to the provincial government. Further development resumed after World War II with the discovery of rich natural resource deposits below the ground and the growth of export markets for these products.

Another event would have an even more galvanizing effect on Saskatchewan's business class: the election of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) on June 15, 1944.





Top left: SABB executives met with Saskatchewan cabinet on December 12, 1958

Top right: Natural Resources Minister Phelps



**“The election of a ‘socialist’ government in Saskatchewan created considerable interest in Canada and the U.S.,” according to historian and first president of the University of Regina, John Archer, in Saskatchewan, A History.**

Canadian newspapers expressed “amazement and alarm” and warned of a pull-out of capital and divestment by industry, while U.S. publications saw the nefarious hand of Moscow behind the election of the first avowedly socialist government on the continent.

Closer to home, the province's business community was concerned, even fearful, that the CCF would implement the party's Regina Manifesto of 1933, which stated boldly that: “No CCF government will rest content until it has eradicated capitalism and put into operation the full programme of socialized planning.”

So not long after the election of Premier T.C. (Tommy) Douglas, the fiery Scottish Baptist minister from Weyburn, plans were afoot to awaken the Saskatchewan Association of Boards of Trade from its self-imposed hibernation.

The Council of the Boards of Trade, which represented the 85 or so boards of trade that still existed in the province, met in the latter part of 1944. The meeting was held to “draft plans for the bringing together of the boards of trade in the southern part of the

province ... to prepare the way for the formation of an association of boards of trade in the province,” said Alex Aitken, commissioner of the Regina Board of Trade, in a letter dated Dec. 15, 1944 to R.L. Christopherson, a Regina businessman and board member. Christopherson would later become the reborn association's first president.

Aitken, one of the prime movers behind the plan to resurrect the Saskatchewan Association of Boards of Trade, wrote to boards of trade across the province, as well as the Canadian Chamber of Commerce (CCC), to help get the fledgling association off the ground.

The long-time secretary treasurer of the Regina Board of Trade sought commitments of participation from other boards and financial assistance from the CCC. He also sought support for a

resolution from the new association asking the CCF government to clarify its position on "free enterprise."

"We are under the impression, rightly or wrongly, that the likelihood of new businesses establishing in Saskatchewan is considerably lessened by the statements which appear from time to time from members of the provincial government detrimental to private business, commonly referred to as free enterprise," Aitken said in a letter dated March 22, 1945.

Aitken was referring to a story in the previous day's edition of The Regina Leader-Post, which quoted Joseph Phelps, Minister of Natural Resources and Industrial Development, as saying that "free enterprise was as dead as a dodo."

Phelps, MLA for Saltcoats, member of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association at age 17, and early supporter of the CCF, was responsible for several government-owned or Crown corporations, including Saskatchewan Clay Products, Saskatchewan Leather Products and Saskatchewan Wool Products.

Phelps's inflammatory rhetoric and some ill-advised actions by the CCF government in its early years gave rise to fears of government takeover and control over large swaths of the economy, including telephones, transportation, natural gas and electricity, and timber, fish and fur marketing.

"The Douglas government, meanwhile, was struggling to accommodate philosophy to practical politics," Archer said in *Saskatchewan, A History*.

"Very early after assuming power the CCF government ventured into new fields of government enterprises and attempted new techniques of management and control. Mistakes and hasty decisions were made," Archer said.

The business community, which had complacently assumed continued rule by the Liberal Party that had governed the province for all but five of the past 40 years, was in a state of shock.

But the boards of trade, particularly in Regina and Saskatoon, soon rallied to the cause of saving free enterprise from the "socialists" in the CCF government and began planning the resurrection of the Saskatchewan Associated Boards of Trade.

After agreeing to form the Saskatchewan Associated Boards of Trade, the delegates elected a president, first and second vice-presidents and an executive committee of eight members. Since the secretary-treasurer was deemed to be most important position, secretary Graham was elected first.

And since both secretary-treasurer and president should come from the same community during the first year at least, given "the need to be constantly in touch

with each other," Thomas Reynolds of Saskatoon was elected president.

Major F. J. James of Regina was elected first vice-president; C. Clare of Prince Albert, second vice-present; and W.E. Dennison of Assiniboia, third vice-president.

As Gordon Cook, commissioner of the Prince Albert Board of Trade, told Aitken in a letter March 16, 1945: "It is the general feeling here that to really be effective there should be an associated boards of trade organized for Saskatchewan. Both Manitoba and Alberta have such an organization and seem to be getting reasonably good results."

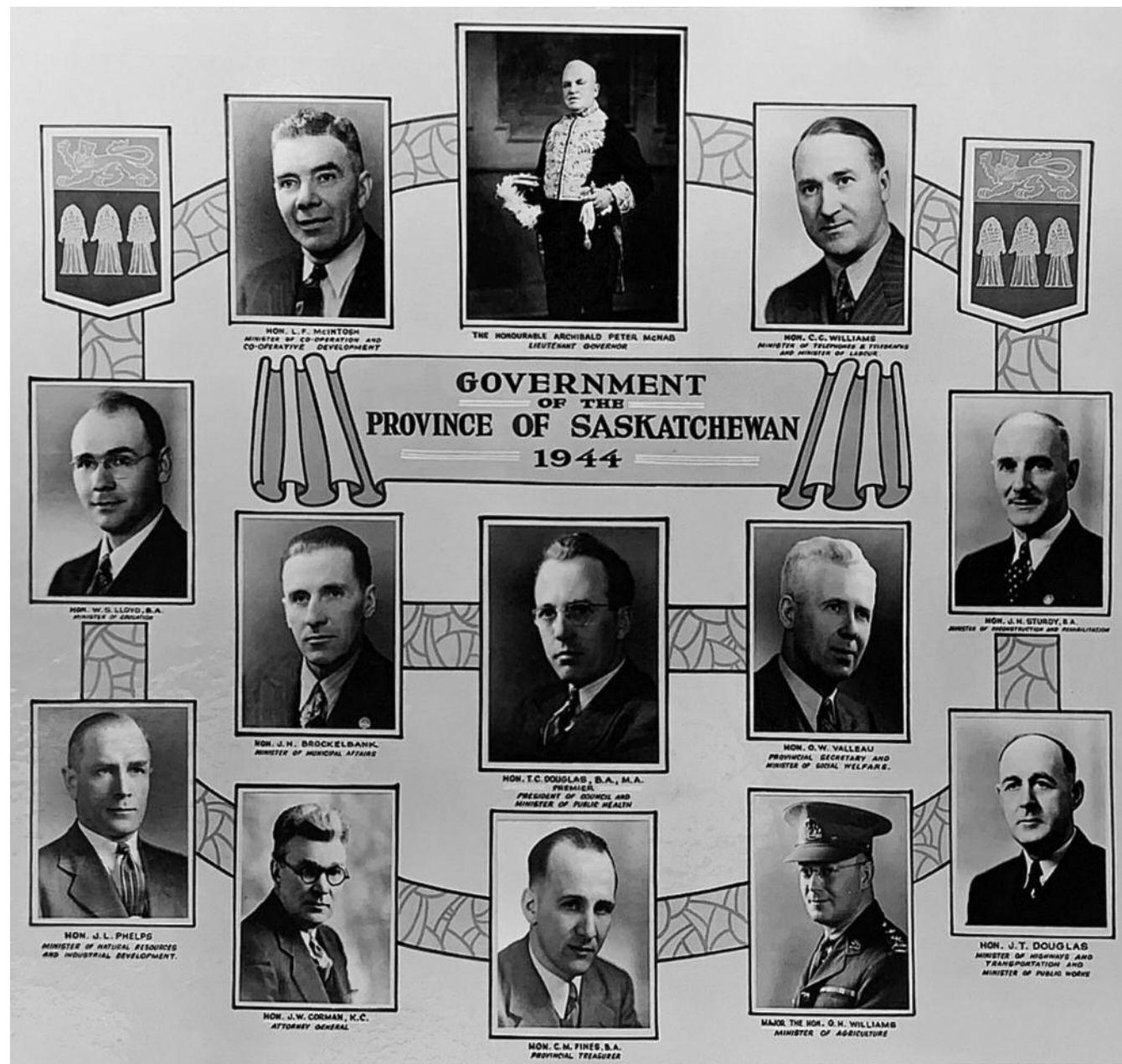
Less than unanimous support, however, was expressed for the proposal by Aitken and MacEachern to demand the government issue a definitive statement regarding its position on "free enterprise." Cook said the P.A. board was prepared to support the proposal, "but believe it would not be a good time to approach the government during this session, with so many private members around to argue the point."

Similarly, Gerry O'Shaughnessy, commissioner of the Moose Jaw Board of Trade, said the members preferred to approach the government "by means of a delegation, rather than presenting a brief."

O'Shaughnessy added the association should be able to provide "concrete



King Street, North Battleford, 1940



CCDF Government, 1944



evidence to present to the government of the doubts that exist today in the minds of businessmen as to whether it would be wise for outside capital to invest in the province at the present time."

On April 14, 1945, Aitken issued a letter to the 85 boards of trade asserting the proposition that: "There should be an Association of Boards of Trade in Saskatchewan."

"There appears to be a need to get together to discuss common problems, to get ideas from what the other fellow is doing, and to express a united voice on certain provincial and national questions," Aitken added.

So two meetings were held -- one in Regina on May 15-16 for the southern boards of trade and one in Saskatoon on May 17-18 for the northern boards.

Accordingly, about 30 delegates from the southern boards of trade gathered under the banner of the Saskatchewan Board of Trade Conference, and heard speeches on Post War Reconstruction in Saskatchewan by J.H. Sturdy, the CCF's Minister of Reconstruction; Freedom of Enterprise and Boards of Trade by W.J. Sheridan, economic development manager, Canadian Chamber of Commerce; and Saskatchewan Highways by J.T. Douglas, minister of highways.

On the second day of the convention, the delegates in Regina passed the following

resolution: "That the Saskatchewan Associated Boards of Trade request the provincial government to define its policy with respect to the status of free enterprise (as contrasted with government enterprise) in the economy of this province."

For their part, the southern delegates left no doubt as to their position, resolving: "That this Conference of Boards of Trade go on record as favouring freedom of enterprise as basic and essential to the development of the province of Saskatchewan, and the preservation of democratic liberty of action, individual initiative, success and happiness."

But the defining act of the conference was the resolution that called upon the CCF government "to define its policy on the status of free enterprise in the province," according to a story in the May 17, 1945 edition of *The Regina Leader-Post*.

The story noted that Premier Douglas and other cabinet members have previously stated "that there is a place for private enterprise," but others, notably Natural Resources Minister Phelps, have inveighed against private business.

While the 31 boards of trade that met in Regina clearly supported the resolution requesting the CCF government issue a statement clarifying the status of private enterprise in the economy, the northern delegates at the meeting in Saskatoon did not.

Highway Minister J.T. Douglas told Saskatoon meeting delegates that the government was "surprised" by the resolution, noting that its position on the role of private enterprise in the economy was well known, according to *The Saskatoon Star*.

Moreover, Douglas said the comments suggesting that the CCF government was against private enterprise were "part and parcel of a nationwide campaign to undermine the Saskatchewan Government," the *Star* said.

"If you pass this resolution, you will be lending yourselves to an organization that aims deliberately to undermine the people's government of Saskatchewan," he warned delegates.

One delegate agreed with Douglas that comments from Eastern Canadian "big shots" that the CCF government was against private enterprise were unfounded. "This resolution brings in politics," said A.T. Turner, a delegate from Watrous. "The government is not interfering in private enterprise."

Another northern delegate, R.M. Mitchell of Nipawin, urged the delegates to neither "justify or condemn" the government. "If Regina and the southern people who met in Regina were so foolish as to pass such a resolution, we in the north should be governed by our own consciences," Mitchell said.



Premier Tommy Douglas at a SABT event



**Top left: Executive Council Meeting in Watrous June 27, 1956**

**Top right: R.L. Christopherson, SABB President 1945-46**



While some delegates argued the resolution was simply seeking information and clarification, most northern delegates believed the resolution was an unnecessary provocation of the government, which was still very popular in many parts of the province.

While the northern and southern delegates disagreed on the resolution regarding the government's position on private enterprise, they could agree on one thing. The delegates voted unanimously in favour of forming the Saskatchewan Associated Boards of Trade to "promote agricultural, commercial, industrial, financial and general interests of the province and the development of its natural resources."

As for the contentious issue of the attitude of the CCF government towards business, the newly formed Saskatchewan Associated

Boards of Trade got support from the editorial page of *The Regina Leader-Post*. "(I)t is not so much what the government has undertaken in the way of industrial and commercial development which is causing concern in business circles as it is the drastic powers which the government has armed itself to go into or take over almost any kind of business at any time."

The editorial cited, once again, Natural Resources Minister Phelps, who told a nominating meeting in Melville: "I have the power and I'm going to use that power on your behalf. Some of those fellows who talk about how much power I've got are going to find out."

"It is little wonder in the face of such threatening and dictatorial declarations as this that the business people of Saskatchewan as represented by the

southern district boards of trade want the government to issue some definite statement of policy," the editorial said.

This would not be the last time the association would clash with the CCF government, as the 1940s and '50s saw more government incursions into the economy.

However, over the years, the association came to grudgingly respect Premier Douglas and some of his less doctrinaire ministers, as they met on a regular basis in private meetings at the Legislative Building and at annual meetings of the association.

So it was with considerable pride that R.L. Christopherson, the first president of the newly formed Saskatchewan Associated Boards of Trade, announced at the annual meeting in Regina June 7, 1946, that the organization had "celebrated its first birthday."

However, Christopherson had a warning for delegates. "This organization is not the first of its kind to operate in Saskatchewan. Some years ago, there was a very live and efficient Association of Boards of Trade of the province."

While the earlier group had achieved some success, "that splendid organization was wrecked on the shoals of regional controversy," Christopherson said. He exhorted his fellow members to "guard



against regionalism" and "keep our eye on the larger field at all times."

Accordingly, delegates threw their support behind resolutions calling for the construction of "irrigation projects throughout the province for the purpose of diversifying the farm industry and bringing about a more stable industrial and agricultural economy to our province," and "wholeheartedly endorse the South Saskatchewan River Irrigation Scheme as proposed by the PFRA (Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration)."

**Highways were a perpetual bone of contention, as the province had only eight per cent of the country's population but 30 per cent of its public highways. Woodward noted that construction of 100 miles of highway cost about \$12 million a year, while the province was currently spending only \$3 million.**

In addition, delegates supported an executive committee motion to have "government-owned revenue producing enterprises to be subject to municipal taxes

on the same basis as privately owned revenue producing enterprises."

With the election of a new president, J.S. Woodward of Saskatoon, the association embarked on a new chapter, which would see the continued battles with the Douglas government, but also progress in achieving many, if not all, of the association's objectives.

Among those issues debated at the 1947 annual meeting were the proposed 44-hour work week, a proposed 30 per cent increase in freight rates, province-wide Daylight Saving Time (adopted), and uniform closing hours for retail business (defeated).

Accordingly, the delegates resolved that the federal government should provide financial assistance to the cash-strapped provincial government to build "at least two east-west hard-surfaced highways" through the province.

Delegates also discussed renaming the association the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce. Moose Jaw Board of Trade commissioner O'Shaughnessy pointed out the phrase board of trade was a "misnomer" as it was the British term for a trade department or ministry. However, no action was taken on the proposal.

In 1948, the provincial government rejected the association's resolution to bring in DST province-wide, as Provincial Secretary O.W.

Valleau said it would not be practical in Saskatchewan.

At the June 29, 1948 AGM, delegates also debated the merits of the association belonging to the Canadian Chamber of Commerce (CCC), adding that the provincial association should reflect the views of the Saskatchewan boards of trade to the national body. To that end, delegates approved a motion for the association to become a member of the CCC and request that the national body establish a field service office in the province. Resolutions calling for federal assistance for highways and a freight rate inquiry, among others, were also passed.

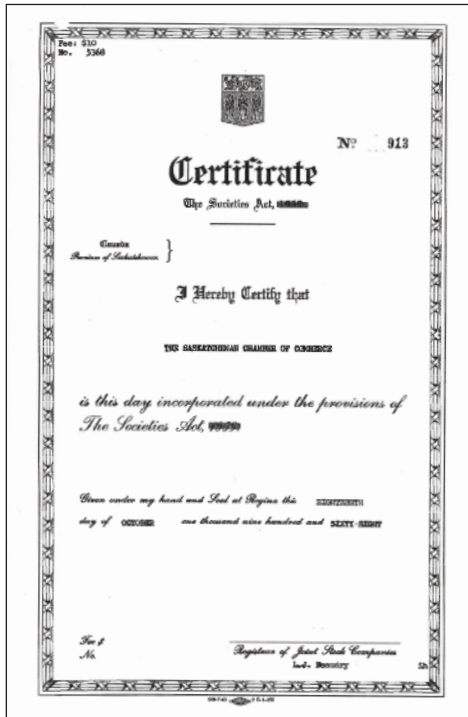
In a news bulletin dated Dec. 14, 1948, Woodward reported that the association was continuing to press the government to encourage more private investment in the province. "It was pointed out to the Premier that Saskatchewan seems to be missing the boat in contrast with the neighbouring province of Alberta in the development of its natural resources."

While oil companies were spending millions of dollars on exploration and development in Alberta, similar resources remain hidden in Saskatchewan. "Our big fear is that this present period of exploration may pass with Saskatchewan having received no benefit," Woodward said.

On Feb. 19, 1949, Premier Douglas finally responded to president Woodward's



Swift Current Theatre



Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce  
Incorporated in 1959 Certificate

accusation that Saskatchewan was "missing the boat" in terms of natural resource development.

"(I)t is not the government's intention to socialise the Saskatchewan oil industry," Douglas said in a letter to the association in December, 1949. "The Saskatchewan government does not anticipate that it will be financially capable of investing large sums in the development or production of its mineral resources in the very near future."

Douglas skillfully dodged the issue of why Alberta was first out of the gate with oil discoveries in Leduc and Turner Valley, noting that very little exploration had been done in Saskatchewan in the preceding decades, well before his government took office.

But he confidently predicted that "this province will take its place among the states and provinces in North America as a leading producer of petroleum products."

In a similar vein, Woodward remarked in a news bulletin dated Oct. 24, 1949, that Saskatchewan was also falling behind its western neighbour in developing its water resource through irrigation projects. "Saskatchewan needs irrigation. There is no doubt about that," Woodward said. "The thing that is hard to understand is why Saskatchewan is only getting conscious of this fact when Alberta was in the irrigation business 50 years ago."

**There certainly was growing influence of the provincial association in getting business issues on the provincial government's agenda. While there was not always agreement, there was at least dialogue and consultation, pointing to an improved relationship between the business community and the CCF government.**

The new decade of the '50s saw slow, but steady, growth of boards of trade and chambers of commerce, which numbered 48 paid up members by early 1950. There was grumbling about the slow pace of development of the South Saskatchewan River project, which was cheekily referred to in a news bulletin item headlined, Will the South Saskatchewan Be Dammed?

At the annual meeting in July, 1950, outgoing president Woodward said he was optimistic (overly optimistic, as it turned out) that construction on the large irrigation dam would start before the next annual meeting. Lawrence L. Ball of Yorkton was elected SABT president at the conclusion of the AGM.

The provincial sales tax was also increased by one percentage point to cover the rising cost of hospitalization, which was now covered by the CCF government. The SABT had advocated against the CCF's healthcare reforms in the past and felt that any sales tax increases would not sit very well with merchants who would pass costs on to the consumer. However, the SABT preferred this taxation strategy as it had the merit of taxing directly.

In his year-end remarks, chamber president Ball looked back on an eventful half century filled with war and depression, but also economic and population growth, and looked forward to the next half. "(T)he role which boards of trade and chambers of commerce, will be called upon to play in the drama which is about to unfold before us, may well challenge all of our energy, initiative and imagination. To survive we will need to be alert and willing to meet this challenge."

In 1951, the SABT was planning to work closely with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. Specifically, the CCC would establish a field service department located in Regina. Under this arrangement, the field service man would act as secretary of the association with the SABT liable for miscellaneous expenses only.

At the annual meeting in Saskatoon on April 30, 1952, Harry Boyce of Regina, proprietor of the Queen's Hotel and past-president of

the Regina Board of Trade, was elected president.

As a result of the impending integration with the CCC, the association moved to rename itself the Saskatchewan Board of Trade (SBT), in addition to other constitutional changes.

The association also commended the Douglas government for announcing in its throne speech that revenue-producing government businesses would pay municipal property taxes. This marked another successful lobbying effort by the fledgling Saskatchewan Board of Trade.

In July, 1952, Herbert (Herb) Purdy, was announced as the incoming manager of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in the province and the new executive secretary of the Saskatchewan Board of Trade.

A Regina native with bachelor's and master's degrees in agriculture from the U of S, Purdy worked for seven years at the federal experimental farm in Swift Current before serving with the Royal Canadian Artillery during the Second World War.

No stranger to the chamber movement, Purdy served as the CCC's prairie region representative from 1946 to 1949, based in Regina, and regional representative for Manitoba and Northern Ontario, out of CCC head office in Toronto, for another three years.

Later that year, a fresh batch of resolutions, including the one commending the government for making government businesses taxable, was conveyed to the provincial cabinet by the executive committee.

"It was felt that this meeting should pave the way for further contacts with the Saskatchewan government and was an excellent step forward toward the establishment of satisfactory liaison with the Saskatchewan Board of Trade and the government of Saskatchewan," Purdy said in the executive committee report.

It was a far cry from the contentious, even confrontational, relationship between the newly formed association and the newly elected CCF government just seven years earlier. However, it didn't change the fact the two groups had fundamental disagreements about the role of private enterprise and government in the economy. In his final address to the SBT's annual meeting in Saskatoon on June 12, 1953, outgoing president Boyce looked back on "the most prosperous year in many respects ever experienced in this province," citing record economic growth, "a tremendous wheat crop" and increased production of minerals, forestry and manufactured products.

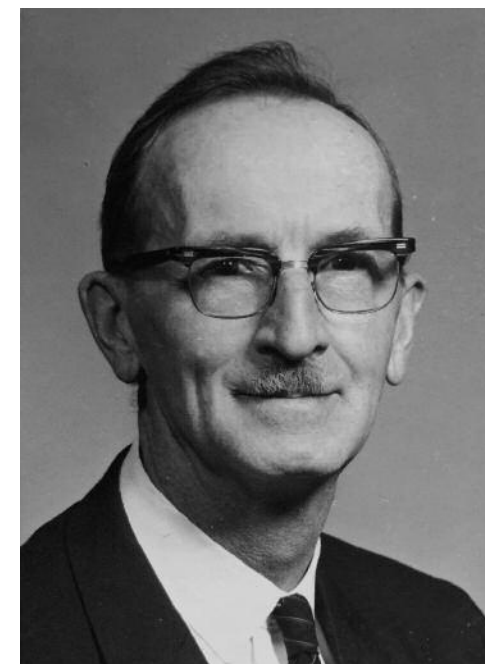
"But," Boyce added, "most, if not all, of this progress is a product of private enterprise, a system that has been so much maligned in

this province. I am gratified by the great strides we are making economically in Saskatchewan, but I am disappointed in the failure of the businessman to stand up for the system that has made these strides possible..."

The SBT also received a setback with the release of the South Saskatchewan River Development Commission report, which expressed doubts about the benefits of the massive irrigation, electricity production and water conservation project. The project included a proposed dam near Outlook – the largest earth fill dam in the world – that would create a huge lake 140 miles (225 km) long.

The royal commission experts put the cost of the project at \$250 million, while the PFRA estimated \$105 million. "Both can't be right," Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent told a delegation in Ottawa on May 4, 1953. "We must get the correct figures and we must be convinced that the project is good for the whole country before we will approve it," St. Laurent told the delegation, which included SBT representatives.

However, it would take the election of the Progressive Conservatives under its Saskatchewan-based leader John G. Diefenbaker, to give the project the go-ahead in 1958 at a cost of \$196 million, including \$96 million for the Gardiner Dam, named for former Liberal cabinet minister and former Saskatchewan premier Jimmy Gardiner.



**H.A. Purdy. SCC Manager 1952-1973**





**Top: Trip with the Department of Mineral Resources to Anglo-Rouyn mine in Lac La Ronge 1956**

**Below: Anglo-Rouyn mine at Lac La Ronge, 1956**

**Opposite top: Anglo-Rouyn mine at Lac La Ronge, 1956**

**Opposite bottom: Party embarking for Anglo-Rouyn mine near Lac La Ronge, 1956**



On Sept. 30, 1953, the executive council, including new president F.J. Workman of Moose Jaw, met with the Douglas cabinet at the executive council chamber at the Legislative Building to discuss the resolutions passed at the annual meeting in June.

Resolutions dealing with natural gas distribution, highways, and tourist accommodation were deemed acceptable by members of the Douglas cabinet. Still, the SBT and the Douglas government would continue to clash over the proper role of the government in the economy. This became clear at the SBT's 1953 annual meeting. "The Saskatchewan Board of Trade opposes the theory that the government should operate all or most of the instruments of production and distribution, since such activities by government lead to waste, political

opportunism, more direction by central authority, loss of individual freedom and responsibility and, in the extreme, from direction of the economy to dictatorship in all matters."

While relations with the Douglas government were generally cordial, there were some testy exchanges at some of the meetings between the SBT's executive council and the provincial cabinet.

For example, when resolutions from the annual meeting were presented to cabinet Dec. 19, 1955, one admittedly "highly controversial" resolution regarding the Trade Union Act, which called for government-supervised strike votes, seemed to stick in Douglas's craw.

According to Purdy's confidential report of that meeting, Douglas stated "that he

could not understand why business organizations, such as the chamber of commerce, should be concerned with the internal operation of a union."

Douglas went on to say that "government would not consider applying regulations to unions that are not applied to other organizations," like publicly traded companies. Or boards of trade, he might have added.

At the annual meeting in Melfort on Oct. 3, 1956, J.D. (Clare) Thacker of Regina became the SBT president. Resolutions were passed on the South Saskatchewan River Dam project, welcome signs on highways, roadside picnic areas, bituminous highways and care of the mentally ill, among others.

When the resolutions were presented to cabinet on Dec. 10, 1956, the mood had

improved considerably from the previous year. "These resolutions had been received by the government in a very cordial manner and each resolution was discussed fully," said the minutes of the executive committee meeting.

The Premier thanked the SBT for its continued support of the dam project and credited the CCC for giving recognition to the South Saskatchewan River dam as a national project.

"The executive secretary reported that in his opinion this was the best hearing we have had with the provincial cabinet and that it indicated real progress in our relations with the government of Saskatchewan," according to the minutes of the meeting with cabinet.

Indeed, the late 1950s probably stand as a high-water mark for relations between the SBT and the Douglas government:

"The views of the Saskatchewan board of trade were regarded with the respect and consideration which they deserved," said president Thacker at the AGM in Swift Current on October 23, 1957.

The proposed name change to the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce was debated and passed at the 1957 annual meeting

At the annual meeting held Oct. 22 -23, 1958, in North Battleford, Thacker, who was elected to a second term in Swift Current, reported that the chamber had finally

achieved its goal of having 100 members – 101 to be exact – in 1958.

One milestone achievement in 1958 was the signing of an agreement between the province and the newly elected federal Progressive Conservative government to proceed with development of the South Saskatchewan River project.

With R. L. (Ralph) Bamford of Moose Jaw elected president for 1959-60, replacing Thacker, the chamber held its annual meeting in Estevan on Oct. 8-9, 1959. Bamford also reported good relations with the Douglas government, with the exception of the chamber's position on public tender for mineral rights on Crown land.

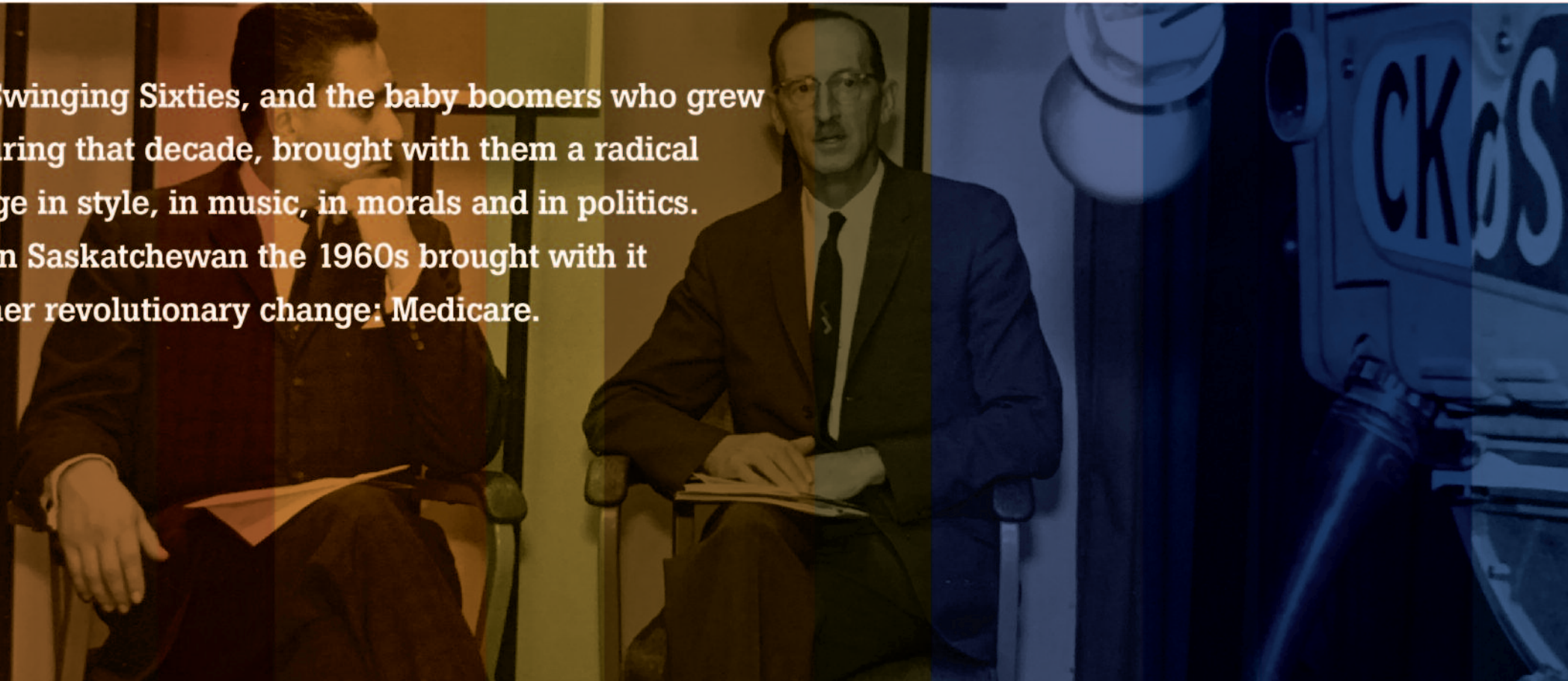
The low-water mark in the chamber's relations with the CCF and the beginnings of a right-ward shift in the political direction of the province began when the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce would side with the province's medical doctors and oppose the imposition of "socialized medicine" or Medicare by the CCF government in 1962.





# Decades of Change & Challenge: The 1960s & '70s

The Swinging Sixties, and the baby boomers who grew up during that decade, brought with them a radical change in style, in music, in morals and in politics. And in Saskatchewan the 1960s brought with it another revolutionary change: Medicare.





AGM, 1975

#### ISSUES OF THE DAY:

- Oppose the Medicare plan
- Deficit spending at the provincial and federal level
- Taxation
- Improved consultation by the provincial government
- Labour unrest
- Inflation
- Slowdown in the oil and gas industry and royalty rates and taxes
- Advocated against the Trade Practices Act
- Provincial government purchase or expropriation of the potash industry
- Increasing amount of government spending on aid programs and subsidies

As the new decade began, the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce was on a roll. Membership had been steadily rising since 1952, reaching 120 in 1960, and integration with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce was proceeding smoothly.

However, the provincial chamber was fixated on one overarching issue: Medicare. The CCF government had pioneered the continent's first hospital insurance plan on Jan. 1, 1947, which entitled every citizen in the province to free hospital care (although a small premium was charged annually).

Then, in a radio speech on Dec. 18, 1959, Premier T.C. Douglas announced his government's long-awaited plan for comprehensive health insurance. The proposed Medical Care Insurance Act would provide universal coverage for medical treatment costs, including doctors' fees - another first in North America. The government would also establish a Medical Advisory Committee to make recommendations to the province on the implementation of the proposed legislation.

While the Hospital Insurance Act was widely accepted by physicians, the Medical Care Insurance Act was met with stiff resistance

by the province's medical association, the opposition Liberal Party and some members of the business community, including the provincial chamber.

In early 1960, the Saskatchewan College of Physicians and Surgeons urged the chamber to oppose the compulsory Medicare plan in the form of a resolution to the provincial government.

Accordingly, at a meeting on Feb. 17, 1960, the executive committee of the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce issued the following submission to the provincial government:

"The Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce does not believe it is in the best interest of the people to initiate compulsory health insurance or state medicine, both from an economic and efficient medical service point of view, largely on the ground that such government sponsored medical plans have in other countries been extremely costly and with very few exceptions have at the same time led to a deterioration of the quality of services and overcrowding of facilities."

In any event, the Medicare debate would be settled -- at least temporarily -- by the re-





Saskatchewan  
Medicare Strike, 1960



election of the CCF government on June 8, 1960, with a slightly larger majority, although its percentage of the popular vote slipped five per cent.

Since Medicare was the central issue of the campaign, Premier Douglas said the election was, in effect, a plebiscite on the government's Medicare plan.

Nevertheless, the executive committee met with members of the Douglas cabinet on Dec. 5, 1960, to discuss its Medicare submission and resolutions adopted by the provincial chamber at its annual meeting in Prince Albert Sept. 23-24, 1960.

Education Minister Woodrow Lloyd took exception to the chamber's submission on Medicare and Attorney-General Robert (Bob) Walker even suggested that the

chamber "had been taken in," according to the confidential minutes of the meeting.

Premier Douglas himself would not be around the provincial scene much longer. In July, 1961, he was elected the first leader of the federal New Democratic Party (NDP), formed from the merger of the CCF and organized labour. While Douglas was gone, the issue of Medicare was back on the front burner again. The Medical Advisory Committee had submitted its interim report in September, 1961, calling for doctors to be paid on a fee-for-service basis and patients charged a small deterrent fee. In October, the Saskatchewan Medical Care Insurance Act was introduced, without the deterrent fees and without the approval of the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

In November, 1961, Woodrow Lloyd was elected leader of the CCF party in

Saskatchewan and hence premier of the province.

On Nov. 17, 1961, secretary-manager Purdy wrote to Premier Lloyd to protest against the proposed act, on the basis that it "violates the basic principle of sound government" by delegating "the responsibility for establishing and administering a plan of medical care insurance for the residents of Saskatchewan."

In addition, Purdy argued that "certain inequities" and "technical difficulties" would result due to the duplication of services and benefits offered by private insurance companies.

At its annual meeting in Tisdale on May 9-11, 1962, the chamber passed a resolution calling for the repeal of the Saskatchewan

Medical Care Insurance Act, which was set to be implemented July 1, 1962, noting that the government had failed to reach an agreement with the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

"While the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce is not opposed to an acceptable medical care program, it continues to oppose the recent enactment of this legislation and its amendments," the resolution stated.

Chamber president H.B. Cowan of Prince Albert remarked that, despite their disagreements, the meeting with the provincial cabinet on Dec. 18, 1961, was "one of the most friendly we have had with cabinet for some time."

That friendly feeling wouldn't last long, however. The chamber and the provincial cabinet would find themselves at loggerheads again when the July 1, 1962 implementation date for Medicare arrived with a full-blown doctors' strike.

Duelling citizens' groups, Keep Our Doctors and Citizens for Medical Care, verbally fought each other over the divisive issue of Medicare, while the provincial government and the province's doctors struggled to find a solution to the impasse.

After three week of intense negotiations, the two sides reached an agreement. Concerns about threats to doctors' control over their practices were resolved, while the concept

of universality was retained. A major health and political crisis had been averted.

By 1963, the chamber and the provincial cabinet were back on speaking terms, with Premier Lloyd requesting the chamber's participation in a hearing in Ottawa with Prime Minister Diefenbaker and the Minister of Transport in June, and another thanking the chamber for its "resolution on the Saskatchewan-Nelson River Development survey and continued support" of the government's position.

By 1964, however, change was in the wind and the bruising battle over Medicare had taken its toll on the popularity of the Lloyd government. The resurgent Liberals, under former CCF MP and Moose Jaw hardware store owner Ross Thatcher, had been steadily gaining strength during the polarizing Medicare debate and defeated the CCF in the 1964 election.

At the annual meeting in Saskatoon on May 7, 1964, the chamber had its own change of leadership, as J.R. Davidson of Regina succeeded W. W. Aikenhead of Melfort as president. But the chamber had other problems besides Medicare to deal with.

Potash mining had begun in the province in 1962 after International Minerals and Chemical (IMC) started production at its underground mine at Esterhazy, while Kalium Chemicals started producing potash at its solution mine at Belle Plaine in 1964. At the executive committee meeting on

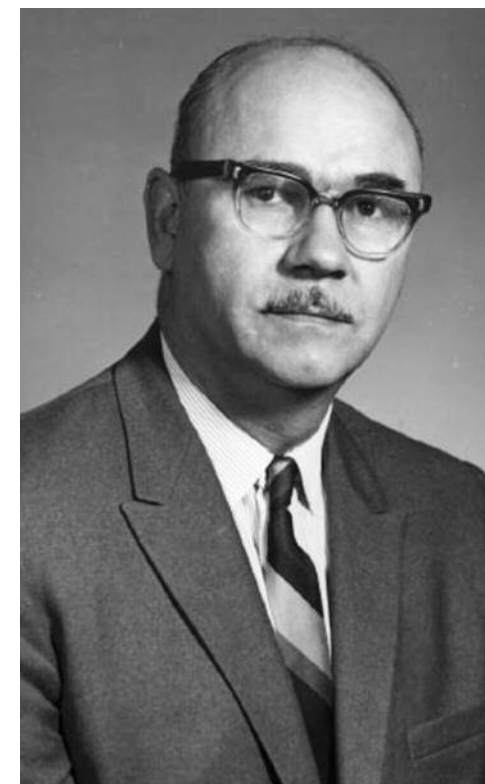
May 19, 1965, Purdy reported that he had sent a letter to Prime Minister Lester Pearson, Finance Minister Walter Gordon and Mines Minister W.M. (Bill) Benidickson on behalf of chamber president, Dr. A.W. Thomson of Watrous.

**"The Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce is concerned about recent reports that the request of the Saskatchewan government for tax concessions to firms engaged in solution mining of potash have been rejected by your government."**

Chamber President Dr. A.W Thomson

The chamber voiced its support for the provincial government's efforts to obtain tax concessions for solution mining equal to conventional or underground potash mining, "so as to create an equitable competitive position for those companies now and in the future," the letter said.

At the annual meeting in Prince Albert May 8-10, 1966, Dr. Thomson noted the Saskatchewan chamber was entering its third decade and "commented on the effectiveness of our organization." Dr. Thomson told delegates that the meeting



**Woodrow S. Lloyd**

Photo courtesy of Biggar Museum and Gallery



Hotel Saskatchewan, 1960s

with the provincial cabinet on Oct. 15, 1965, saw the majority of the chamber's resolutions accepted "to the point that where we had few unimplemented recommendations left."

"The president also referred to the Premier's statement concerning the value of the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce presentations and their value in framing legislation."

Dr. Thomson also reported on the integration agreement between the provincial chamber and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, which took effect in 1952. Under the agreement, the national chamber would cover salaries and overhead expenses of the provincial office. In return, the Saskatchewan chamber would have complete autonomy, with respect to policy, programs and resolutions, while agreeing not to solicit business directly for corporate membership support.

Dr. Thomson, the immediate past-president, reminded delegates that the chamber had two main objectives: to create an effective movement and express the views of the business community on provincial policy.

At a directors' meeting on Sept. 13, 1968, secretary-manager Purdy reported that the chamber was asked by the Saskatchewan Institute of Public Affairs to rank the importance of half a dozen major issues. When the board of directors chose "unrest in society and on the campus" as the

second major issue, director Allan Tubby of Saskatoon objected. He felt that this subject was receiving far too much publicity, which was making matters worse.

But the fourth-ranked issue, the so-called "The Indian-Metis Problem – A cultural island," would play a much more prominent role in the chamber's future policy-making.

In fact, Premier Thatcher had asked the chamber to appoint a representative to a committee studying "the Indian-Metis problem in Saskatchewan" and suggested that the "Saskatchewan chamber would be requested to promote employment of Indian and Metis people at some future date."

At a directors' meeting on Dec. 10, 1968, C.W. Cameron, the chamber's representative on the Task Force on Indian Opportunities, said the task force's first order of business was finding jobs for Indian people.

The task force found that jobs were available if the "native people" could be moved to the regions where the jobs were located. But Cameron said this was just the first step and that a lot more work would have to be done to find permanent solutions.

Cameron told the directors that "the plight of the Indian and Metis people in Saskatchewan was as bad, if not worse, than anywhere else in Canada.

At the annual meeting went ahead in Yorkton on May 4-6, 1969, chamber president Dr. R.W. Irwin of Swift Current outlined the activities of the chamber over the past year, including representations to provincial and federal governments, promotion of economic education in elementary and secondary schools and "our support of the Indian-Metis program."

C.W. Cameron, now chairman of the Indian-Metis Task Force subcommittee on industrial employment, reported on the "many problems relating to the training and employment of Indian and Metis people." Some of the problems Cameron cited include the adoption of Indian and Metis children by non-native families, the attitude of labour unions, control of Indian land, tenant/landlord relationships, and counselling of non-native employees. It was suggested that general education may be the best means of helping the problem.

Also in 1969, the chamber seemed to be having a full-blown identity crisis. Membership and attendance at annual meetings continued to decline, chambers were airing their dirty laundry in the press, and other business groups, like the Retail Merchants' Association, were encroaching on the chamber's turf.

The Saskatchewan Industrial Development Association had been formed because it felt the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce had not been doing its job of industrial promotion.



As the decade of the 1960s was ending, the chamber sounded the alarm about government spending and rising inflation, noting that "the economy of Saskatchewan and of Canada appears to be in grave danger as a result of the increasing number of aid programs and subsidies of all kinds."

As a result, a resolution was passed at the 1969-70 annual meeting urging government at all levels "to refrain from participation in new aid or subsidy programs wherever possible."

That concern would increase dramatically in the 1970s, as the twin evils of deficit spending and rapidly rising inflation would put a stranglehold on economic growth, a phenomenon that would come to be known as "stagflation."

Another challenge facing the chamber was the defeat of the Thatcher Liberals and the election of the NDP government on June 23, 1971, under former Douglas cabinet minister Allan Blakeney.

While Blakeney was no fire-breathing radical, his NDP government campaigned against the Liberals' "give-aways" to oil and gas, forestry and mining companies, as well as the Thatcher government's increasingly tough stance against strikes and organized labour in general.

Thatcher was reportedly shocked by the election results, which saw the NDP take 55 per cent of the popular vote and 45 seats in

the 60-seat legislative assembly, and died a month after the election.

The chamber mourned the passing of the staunch free enterpriser and political soulmate. "Not only did private enterprise suddenly become a bad word politically, but we also lost a strong champion who believed in the right of the individual to be rewarded for his initiative," chamber president Michael Stryjek of Humboldt said in his speech to the annual meeting in Moose Jaw on May 7, 1972.

Because of the change in government, it was October before the chamber was able to present its resolutions to the NDP cabinet. "We found the meeting cordial, but otherwise not too fruitful," Stryjek told delegates.

On the other hand, the meeting with the Opposition Liberals went better. "We met quite informally and had an excellent discussion with regards to many of our policies," the president told delegates. Resolutions from the 1971-72 annual meeting in Moose Jaw were focused largely on public spending and taxation. One resolution noted that government expenditures now represented more than one-third of the country's total outlay in goods and services, and the resulting taxation levels were placing a "heavy burden on individuals and corporations."

The resolution said the increase in government expenditures should not

exceed the average growth in GNP (gross national product), all government programs should be reviewed and evaluated, and "welfare" programs restrained or curtailed if they result in a drastic slowdown in economic growth and increased unemployment.

The chamber was also feeling shell-shocked by the barrage of legislation being passed by the new NDP government, which introduced 147 bills on one session – 29 more than the previous record.

"The present session of the Legislature could be regarded as the most productive in history," secretary-manager Purdy reported, tongue in cheek, at the 1971-72 annual meeting. And many of those bills, like the Trade Union Act, Labour Standards Act, Land Bank Act, Foreign Ownership of Land Act, and Consumer Affairs Act, affected business directly.

"When the Land Bank Act was announced, we urged every chamber to have representation at the public meetings to discuss the program and make their opinions known," Purdy said, referring to the legislation to establish the land bank commission, which purchased farm land and leased it back to young farmers.

But the chamber found that its representations often fell on deaf ears. In November, 1971, the chamber submitted a brief to the Minimum Wage Board, calling for a differential minimum wage for rural



**Maxwell Henderson, former Auditor General of Canada was the guest speaker at the 1977 SCC AGM.**



H.A. Purdy Interview on the midday show to discuss Operation Freedom. May 21, 1962

areas and students. "Our presentation and those of other business associations, groups and individuals had little influence on the decisions of the Minimum Wage Board," Purdy reported.

President Stryjek complained of the increasing polarization of views that seemed to pit business against organized labour, government, academia and the consumer.

**"In the process of changing society, there seems to have developed an ever-widening gap between the business community and society at large. The motivation of business is more and more questioned. The profit motive is held suspect, in fact, in many places the word 'profit' is held to be a dirty word."**

SCC President Stryjek

The annual meeting also saw Eric Robert (Bob) Olson, general manager of the Alwinal Potash of Canada mine at Lanigan, elected president.

The chamber attempted to deal with the flood of provincial legislation issuing forth from the Legislative Building by passing a resolution calling for the government to "inform the public, well in advance, of the nature of new legislation, allowing for full consideration, discussion and reaction."

At the AGM on May 5-7, 1974, in Weyburn, chamber president O. J. (Orris) Keehr of Regina reported the chamber raised the issue on the large volume of legislation emanating from Regina with the NDP cabinet. He said the chamber also complained about the government "changing the rules after the game has started," specifically referring to bills affecting the oil and forestry industries, potash mining and other businesses.

"We stress the disastrous effect that this sort of thing will have on future investment," Keehr said. But he added, "I am sorry to say that I cannot report much progress in this regard."

Labour unrest was another major issue for the chamber in 1974-75, as a series of strikes both inside and outside the province caused significant economic damage to the provincial economy and individual businesses.

In May, 1974, the chamber sent a letter to Premier Blakeney regarding the "crippling construction strikes throughout the province," urging the government to "make every effort to resolve the labour dispute

and bring the work stoppage to a suitable conclusion."

Similarly, in August, 1974, the chamber urged Parliament to "resume sitting immediately in an attempt to settle the grain handlers' dispute." The chamber said in a news release that the dispute was "highly detrimental to the economy of Saskatchewan because the province relied greatly on grain exports moved by rail through the ports of Vancouver and Thunder Bay."

In September, a follow up telegram was sent to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and the federal cabinet urging them to take "immediate action to compel the grain handlers to return to work while a settlement was reached."

In addition, the chamber was increasingly worried about the slowdown in the oil and gas industry due to NDP government policy. The Oil and Gas Conservation, Stabilization and Development Act permitted the government to control production, set retail prices, establish a marketing agency and take control of up to 90 per cent of provincial oil and gas reserves.

The act would be challenged by the oil industry in the courts and found to be *ultra vires* by the Supreme Court of Canada, although a settlement was eventually reached with the oil industry.

Another issue that would loom even larger in the years ahead was NDP government

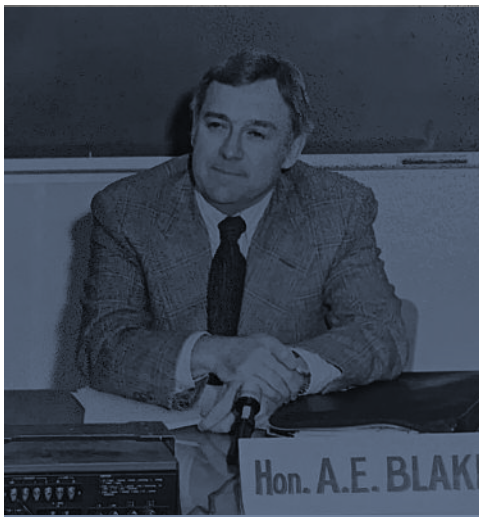


Michael Stryjek, SCC President, 1971-1973



Guests at Political Forum, 1978.





**Blakeney at the We All Profit from Profits presentation at the 1976 SCC AGM.**

**Above: Collective Bargaining Workshop, 1978.**

policy regarding potash, specifically its plan to acquire a share in the production of potash, ostensibly as a means of monitoring and encouraging the sale of the mineral. The chamber was quick to react.

In a letter to Premier Blakeney, the chamber rejected the government's rationale for attempting to take over all or part of the foreign-owned potash industry, adding that negotiating a mutually agreeable rate of return would be a viable alternative to expropriation.

As the representative of the business community, the chamber believed it had an obligation to oppose government intervention in private enterprise. "The chamber stated the government did not have a clear mandate from the people to introduce legislation of such magnitude, and could not support the unjustifiable risk of working capital required."

Despite the chamber's dire warnings, a Crown corporation, Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan (PCS), was duly formed in 1975 and proceeded to negotiate the purchase of four mines and the production capacity of a fifth mined under contract. The acquisitions resulted in the Crown Corporation owning 40 per cent of Saskatchewan's productive capacity.

Rising inflation and continued labour unrest were other issues that preoccupied the chamber in 1975. The chamber applauded the federal government's Anti-Inflation Program as an effective way to combat the nation's inflationary problems.

The chamber met with the NDP cabinet on Oct. 17, 1975, to discuss the chamber's statement of policy and resolutions arising from the 1975-76 annual meeting in Lloydminster, specifically its concerns about

inflation, wage and price controls, and labour unrest.

"Strong emphasis was placed on excess government expenditures at all levels, reinforced by the ever-increasing number of civil servants and massive government building programs, as a primary cause of inflation."

As for solutions, the chamber delegation recommended a thorough review of government programs to eliminate duplication, acceptance of the federal wage and price control policy and a "program of fiscal restraint."

The NDP government's policy to acquire a significant proportion of the potash mining assets in the province continued to concern the chamber in 1976. The chamber suggested that the government offer 50 per cent or more of the shares of Potash Corp. of Saskatchewan to residents and other Canadians.

However, it would take a dozen years and a change of government for the chamber's plan to privatize Potash Corp. to come to fruition.

The chamber also blasted the NDP government for its oil and gas royalty rates and taxation policies, noting that the 254 oil and gas wells drilled in 1975 was the lowest in 24 years, while Alberta saw 3,700 wells drilled during the same period. The reason for this vast discrepancy was that Alberta



producers receive a 150 per cent larger return per barrel than Saskatchewan producers, the chamber said.

The chamber urged the NDP to bring Saskatchewan royalty rates closer to those in Alberta and B.C. to assist the industry which had almost become dormant in the past two years.

**“The chamber has consistently opposed incursions by government into industrial undertakings, and remains convinced that competitive enterprise is the best form of organization to develop, own and operate industries,” according to the policy statements and resolutions passed at the annual meeting in Swift Current, May 6-8, 1976.**

In the same vein, the chamber called for the Blakeney government to follow Alberta's example and lower taxes for businesses, especially small business operations.

“Although we do not have the wealth of Alberta in this province, nevertheless we

should not, and must not, ignore its competitive advantages to the businessman,” which include no sales tax, lower personal and corporate income tax rates and a recently introduced package of tax incentives for small business, the chamber argued.

**However, the chamber did score some wins as the province eliminated succession duties and gift taxes in the 1976-77 budget, a welcome move which the chamber has been encouraging since its inception, according to F.L. Anderson of Regina, chairman of the finance committee.**

At its annual meeting April 15-16, 1977, in North Battleford, the chamber continued its attack on the NDP government's interference in private business and intervention in the economy. One resolution called for the suspension of the Trade Practices Act, which sets out unfair acts, such as “trickery” or high-pressure sales tactics or grossly overpricing products.

The resolution recommended the government not pass the proposed legislation because the benefit to the consumer would be minimal, and, to a great extent, the proposed bill would overlap with existing federal legislation under the Combines Investigations Act.

Similarly, when 60 or so chamber members met with Premier Blakeney and members of his cabinet on Sept. 7, 1977, they outlined



**Hon. Synyder, Minister of Labour, bringing greetings on behalf of the Saskatchewan government at the SCC Presidents Dinner on May 9, 1972.**



Above: Issues of the Day. 1978.

Opposite top: Speak Out For Business was the 1976 SCC AGM theme.

Opposite bottom left: Delegates at the AGM in the 1970s.

Opposite bottom right: Cluff Lake Camp, 1969.

their concerns about the "growing size and influence of government in our society, and particularly in our economy."

Specifically, the chamber recommended "shifting some government activities to the private sector," making governments more accountable and developing incentives to promote greater efficiency in government operations.

R. H. (Harvie) Allan of Regina, who was elected president at the annual meeting in North Battleford, remarked that the Saskatchewan chamber was increasingly "becoming the voice of business in our province."

According to the 1978-79 annual report, "The Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce can now claim to be a far more representative voice of business than ever before. An intensified legislative drive in support of business objectives resulted in some important developments and achievements in the past year."

"Through a network of almost 100 chamber members and boards, representing an entire system of almost 13,000 business people, the chamber is able to provide the provincial government with the grass roots' sentiment of the business community," the annual report said.

The chamber was also providing more services to its members, including group insurance, business seminars on labour

relations and communications services, such as the Business Review, Legislative Report and Viewpoint surveys.

"The Saskatchewan chamber registers a steady increase in its influence as the 'Voice of Business' in this province," said chamber president Rnold Smith of Regina in the 1978-79 annual report.

Smith, who was elected at the annual meeting in Yorkton, April 28, 1979, said the chamber's policies were being developed and presented more effectively and its opinions are being sought out prior to the introduction of legislation.

The result was a less adversarial relationship with government, with confrontation replaced by recommendations based on concepts that reflect basic business precepts.

Regina businessman G.E. (Ross) Sneath, who was elected president at the annual meeting in Yorkton, April 27-28, 1979. Sneath believed that a co-operative approach worked better than a confrontational approach with the provincial government. "Our plan has been to co-operate with the government through discussion and constructive suggestions and criticism. By our positive input, we believe that we can prove that many governmental services, programs and facilities would be better left in the competent hands of free enterprise," Sneath said in the 1979-80 annual report.

However, the decade of the 1980s would prove just as challenging as the '70s. Double-digit inflation and sky-high interest rates, deficit spending and a crisis of confidence in our financial institutions would exact a heavy toll on many Canadian businesses, including some well-known members of the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce.







# Decades of Deficits, Debt & Diminishing Returns: The 1980s & '90s

As the economy began to stumble, tripped up by rising interest rates and rampant inflation, the resulting deficits and debt began to force government to cut spending and jack up taxes. Compounding this fiscal retrenchment was a prolonged recession that brought many businesses to their knees.

Wholesale  
District.  
Regina



SCC publication: Business Review Magazines

### ISSUES OF THE DAY:

- Public vs. Private Ownership
- Lobby for changes to the Trade Union Act
- Property tax, specifically lobbying for the removal of the business tax from the education portion of property taxes
- Free trade negotiations with the USA
- Federal tax reform
- Provincial and federal deficit spending
- Minimum wage
- Economic development
- Health and education
- Environmental regulations
- Sales tax harmonization
- Formation of the Aboriginal Economic Development Task Force

The previous two decades saw tremendous change in Saskatchewan, with the advent of Medicare in the '60s and the 'nationalization' of the potash mines in the '70s, along with rising deficits and double-digit inflation across the country.

The next two decades would be, if anything, even more challenging for the province's business community. Runaway inflation would push interest rates through the roof, causing a massive and prolonged contraction in the economy. Deficit spending would also reach record heights, eventually necessitating a dramatic reduction in government spending.

The result was a decade that began with great promise only to end in a decade of economic recession and government austerity.

President V.L. (Lorne) Humphreys of The Harwood's Moose Jaw Inn, noted in the 1980-81 annual report that the debate over the pros and cons of public versus private ownership continued unabated in the province.

"The loss of the entrepreneurial individual drive... has been, and will continue to be, a

major concern of our organization," said Humphreys.

The chamber continued its battle against changes in labour legislation, such as the Labour Standards Act amendments, which would require employers to give employees two consecutive days off, one of which must be Sunday.

**Similarly, the chamber continued to lobby for changes to the Trade Union Act that "achieve a better balance between the interests of unions and their members, and the interests of employers and the general public."**

In the 1981-82 annual report, president M.P. (Mervin) Zulynik, president of Tri-City Surveys of North Battleford, pointed out that several lobbying efforts by the chamber had borne fruit.

For example, the chamber had "vigorously opposed" a proposed universal long-term disability insurance plan as being "totally out of proportion to the actual needs of Saskatchewan residents." The Minister of Labour ultimately shelved the proposal, citing "limited support" from the public. Similarly, the chamber had successfully





Left: Premier Grant Devine at the 39<sup>th</sup> AGM and Business Outlook Conference in 1984



Right: Chamber officers discuss education and health tax policy

Opposite top: 1983, SCC Executive Director Bob Finlay speaks with a British businessman during the official function of the British Trade Mission

Opposite below: The 1984 London Investment and Business Opportunities Seminar



SCC President Marcel de la Gorgendiere

argued for "merit-based rates," which would reward employers with good job safety records with lower premiums, and "return-to-work" incentives for injured workers through the Workers' Compensation Board.

The year 1982 also saw a watershed moment in the province's history, with the election of Grant Devine's Progressive Conservatives, defeating the Blakeney NDP, which had been in office since 1971.

Devine, a farmer with a PhD in agricultural economics who taught at the U of S, promised to make Saskatchewan "Open for Business" and proceeded to do that, by reining in and eventually selling off several Crown corporations, including the Potash Corp.

Devine also cut taxes for business, introduced a three-year royalty holiday for

the oil patch and made good on a campaign promise to axe the gas tax, putting about \$400 million a year back into the pockets of consumers.

But the loss of the gas tax revenue also punched a big hole into provincial coffers, which contributed to a deficit of \$1.2 billion by the end of the Devine government's first four-year term of office.

The chamber quickly got on board with the new government, co-sponsoring the Open for Business conference, which outlined the government's initiatives to attract investment to the province. Following the conference, chamber president Ray Malinoski, president of Leon's Manufacturing of Yorkton, joined Industry and Commerce Minister Paul Rousseau on a 17-day ministerial mission to five European countries.

"The mission was successful, and it is expected that two foreign companies will invest in the province within a year," the annual report said. The chamber also applauded the Devine government's commitment to public sector wage restraint, more balanced labour legislation, and a major review of the NDP's growing collection of Crown corporations.

**Two measures lobbied for by the chamber – an increase in commission for collecting the Education & Health (E&H) tax and removal of E&H tax from children's clothing – were introduced in the 1982 budget.**

Chamber members met with Finance Minister Bob Andrew in January, 1983 to discuss the 1983-84 budget. "While the growing deficit announced in the 1983 budget is of concern, its impact is offset



by the fact that it is 'manageable' – temporary rather than structural," the annual report said.

"Its cause appears to lie in reduced revenue, not in government expenditure (where, in fact, we saw some welcome government restraint)," the report added.

Unfortunately, that sanguine assessment would prove to be wildly inaccurate. Rising interest rates would cause the accumulated deficit to balloon to \$15 billion by 1991-92 and interest payments on the debt to \$500 million, the third-largest expenditure of government behind health and education.

In the 1983 annual report, chamber president Marcel de la Gorgendiere reflected on a year that saw significant changes to the Trade Union Act, introduction of venture capital tax credits, and elimination of sales tax on R&D prototypes, thanks in large measure to the chamber's lobbying efforts.

The chamber also participated in a six-day government-business trade mission to London, U.K., in October, 1983, to promote the province as a good place to invest and do business. The highlight of the trade mission was a one-day investment and business opportunities seminar attended by more than 100 financiers and industrialists.

***Another positive development for the chamber in 1983 was the announcement of the first-ever Achievement in Business Excellence (ABEX) Awards, which was scheduled to take place in October, 1984.***

***While several chamber Directors and volunteers helped to create the ABEX Awards, much of the credit goes to Roger Phillips, president of IPSCO, who was the catalyst for this business recognition program.***

***"The ABEX Awards may be the most significant long-term step our organization has taken for the business community and the general public," said Marcel de la Gorgendiere, SCC President, 1983-84.***

The ABEX Awards gala was held in Regina Oct. 17, 1984 and attracted a capacity crowd of 500. Develcon, a Saskatoon tech firm, was named the 1984 Business of the Year, along with 11 other category winners. Unfortunately, Canada's economy was still sluggish, burdened with high unemployment and high interest rates, huge deficits and slow economic growth.

The moribund economy continued to be top of mind when chamber president John Nightingale of Saskatoon wrote his president's message in the 1985 annual report.

"For the past three years we have believed we were in an economic depression," said Nightingale, president of Key Lake Mining Corp. "Now we believe this might be a normal level of activity."

Nightingale, who also served as president of the Saskatchewan Mining Association, said the business community was operating on tighter budgets and "this situation is likely to continue."

**Workers' Compensation Board issues continued to preoccupy the chamber's labour committee. The chamber successfully lobbied against changes to the formula for income compensation that could result in an injured worker earning more on compensation than at work.**

Once again, the chamber agitated for changes to the Trade Union Act, and







Left: 1984 ABEX

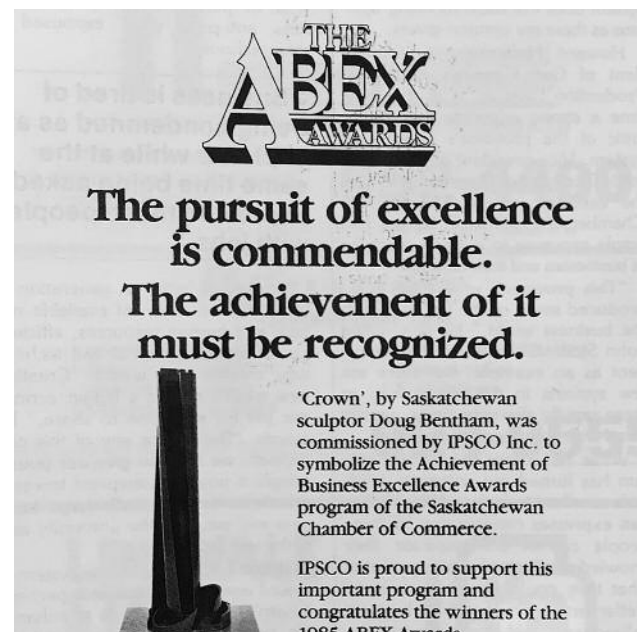
Top right: Roger Phillips, 1984 IPSCO President and creator of the ABEX Awards

Below: ABEX Advertising 1984

Opposite top left: Issue of the Day, Free Trade

Opposite right: R.B. (Boyd) Robertson 1987 SCC President

Opposite below: 1987 Montana Chamber of Commerce and SCC meet to discuss free trade





Labour Standards Act, which the PC government indicated would see a major overhaul in the next session.

Property tax reform, specifically the removal of the business tax from the education portion of property taxes, was another key objective of the chamber's economic development committee.

The March 26, 1985 provincial budget was seen as positive for small business. "However, the fact there was no serious attempt to attack the ever-increasing deficit is cause for alarm," the chamber said. While the burgeoning provincial deficit would prove to be big shock to chamber members, an even bigger one came in the form of the sudden collapse of Pioneer Trust on Feb. 7, 1985.

The Regina-based financial institution had run into financial trouble in the 1980s due to the stagnant real estate market in Western Canada, which had undermined its mortgage lending business. In January 1985, the Devine government had agreed to backstop a \$25-million preferred share issue by Pioneer Trust's parent company, Canadian Pioneer Management (CPM), which would be used to keep the trust company afloat. But a review of the company's books by finance department officials caused Finance Minister Bob Andrew to withdraw the guarantee, triggering the collapse of Pioneer Trust, and the immediate closure of its 11 branches across the province.

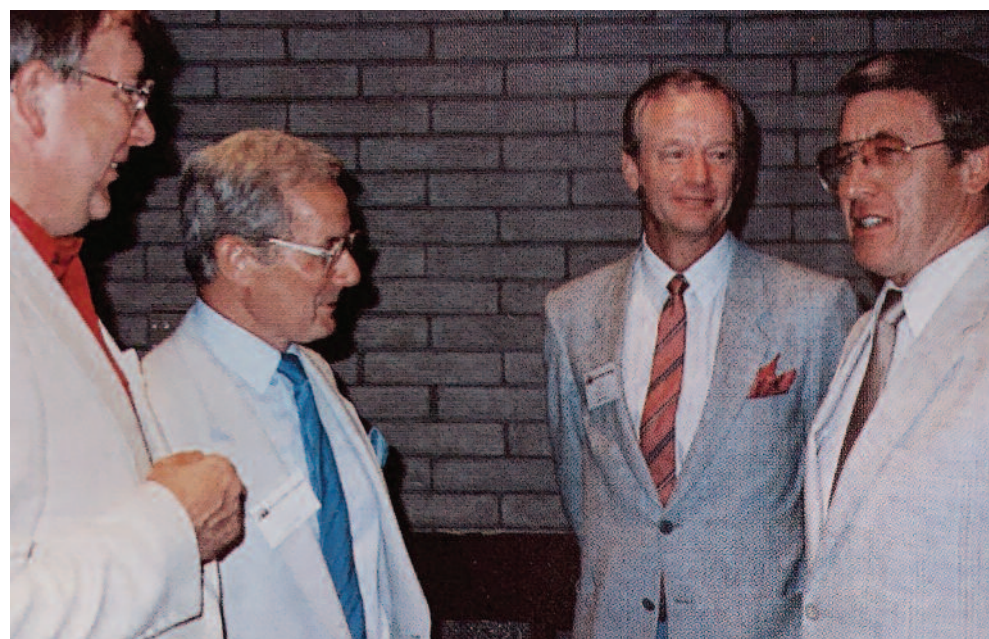
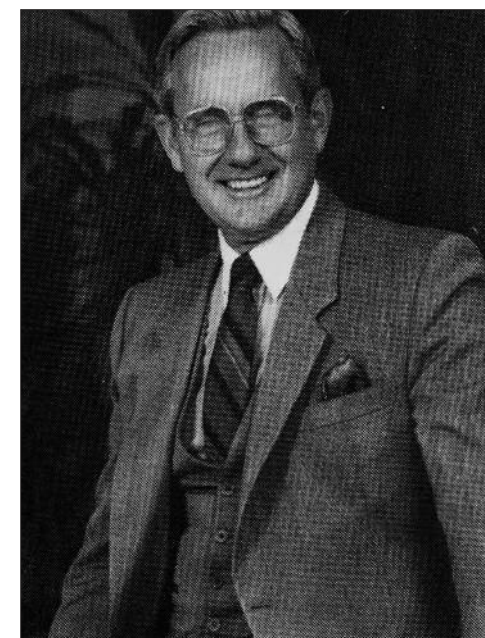
The collapse of Pioneer Trust was the largest financial failure in Saskatchewan history, with \$243 million in funds on deposit, and sent shock waves through the business community. As Royal Bank Saskatchewan vice-president (and soon to be chamber president) Boyd Robertson told Maclean's magazine: "It is a devastating blow to the provincial economy."

By 1986, however, the chamber had moved onto to new challenges, namely free trade negotiations with the U.S. and federal sales tax reform, in addition to the ongoing issues of property tax, business tax and the ever-growing provincial and federal deficits.

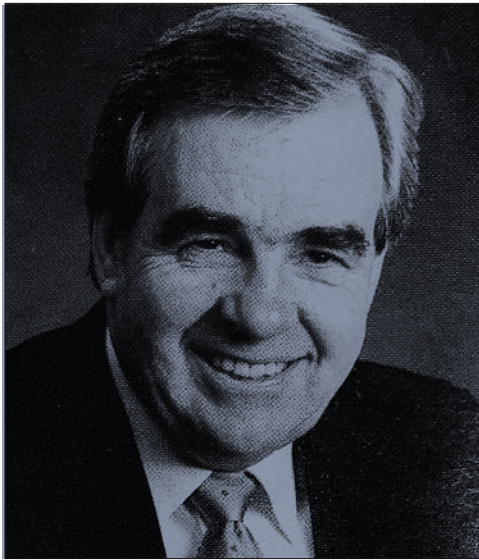
While admitting free trade was controversial, the chamber adopted the position that "Canada should pursue a comprehensive trade agreement with the U.S.," according to the 1986 annual report.

Incoming chamber president Boyd Robertson spoke to the Montana Chamber of Commerce in July 1986 on the topic *Good Neighbours Should Be Good Partners*. He even outdrew U.S. Vice-President George. H.W. Bush, who was speaking at the same convention hotel!

The chamber also embraced the need for reform of the federal Manufacturers' Sales Tax, which was generally agreed to be unfair, outdated and inefficient. One proposed solution was the Business Transfer Tax (BTT), which would tax the difference between a business's sales







1987 SCC President R.G. (Bob) Bundon



Mary Ann McFadyen, SCC Managing Director 1987

and its purchases. The BTT was a forerunner of the value-added Goods and Services Tax (GST).

Business tax, which was initiated in 1940 to pay for "extra" services for business, such as street paving, lighting and parking, was another bone of contention for the chamber. With \$38 million in business tax collected annually, the chamber called for the education portion of business tax to be removed immediately and the municipal half phased out over three years.

The chamber also continued to hammer away at the province's accumulated deficit, which had grown to an estimated \$3 billion since the first deficit budget in 1982. A chamber task force came up with a five-point plan to reduce and eliminate the deficit, including raising taxes and decreasing spending on a one-to-one ratio, implementing a special deficit tax and deficit fund to show the true cost of deficit financing and prohibiting deficit financing by legislation.

"We still feel deficit financing should be abolished by law," Robertson said in the annual report. "We cannot continue to live beyond our means."

The highlight of 1987 for the chamber was the Free Trade Conference in Saskatoon, March 7-8, which attracted 450 delegates from across Western Canada. The two-and-a-half day conference featured 54 speakers, including Canada's ambassador to the U.S., Allan Gotlieb.

The conference also attracted many critics and opponents of free trade, some of whom demonstrated in front of the conference centre in downtown Saskatoon.

**"It is unfortunate that such things as the free trade initiative have become politicized to the extent that they attract a great deal of criticism from dissenting political parties and groups, which have a tendency to distort the initiative and the issues," said chamber president Robert (Bob) Bundon.**

Bundon, a Saskatoon accountant, said in the 1987 annual report that lobbying the provincial government is "required on a constant basis" and will likely increase "now that we are entering the privatization era."

However, Bundon was confident that the chamber had the expertise to respond to the issues, and that government would continue to seek and respect the chamber's views and that the chamber membership supported the chamber's initiatives.

The deficit continued to be a major concern of the chamber, which noted that the accumulated deficit was forecast to hit \$10.8 billion and interest payments on the debt the third-largest expenditure of government by 1989-90.

Business tax was another hot topic for the chamber, which repeated its call to eliminate the education portion of the tax and phase out the remaining half in three years. The government responded by making available \$10 million in matching grants to local governments to reduce the tax burden on small business.

1988 saw the passage of the free trade agreement with the U.S. following a divisive fall election fought largely on the issue. With the re-election of the Progressive Conservatives under Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, the Free Trade Agreement became law on Jan. 1, 1989.

"Some things will change because of free trade, some businesses will likely disappear, and there are still many hurdles to deal with, but I believe the opportunities are much greater than ever before," said SCC President Royce Reichert.

But Reichert, president of Badge Services of Estevan, an oilfield service company, admitted the year had been a tough one for his company and others in the oil patch due to plummeting oil prices and reduced drilling activity.

The world price of oil, which had peaked at \$35 US a barrel in 1980s, fell from \$27 US to below \$10 US in 1986. The price collapse was the result of an oil glut due largely to the global economic slowdown.

**Another chamber recommendation dating back to 1980 – to provide rebates to companies with good workplace safety records – was paying big dividends for Saskatchewan businesses. In 1988, more than half of employers received \$7.1 million in premium rebates from the Workers' Compensation Board, while a total of \$40 million in rebates were received over the previous eight years.**

**Persistent lobbying by the chamber also persuaded the provincial government to rebate \$30 million to the business community over three years as partial compensation for paying the business tax.**

1989 marked another milestone for the provincial chamber, with the election of S.J. (Sylvia) Kish, owner of Sylvia Kish Wardrobes Inc. of Regina, the first woman president of the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce.

Also, with the resignation of executive vice-president Bob Finlay, the chamber also named its first female executive director, M.A. (Mary Ann) McFadyen, who had served for years as managing director of the chamber.

In the 1989 annual report, Kish highlighted the long list of issues the chamber was

engaged in, such as minimum wage, economic development, health and education, debt and deficits, sales tax harmonization, occupational health and safety, environmental regulations, with both provincial and federal governments.

"...the chamber's committees continue to have excellent leadership and participation, which is imperative in order that our mandate to lobby government can be wisely exercised," Kish added.

On the subject of federal sales tax reform, the chamber was adamant that changes were needed, but that "the proposed Goods and Service Tax, in its present form, cannot be supported."

While it agreed with the reduction in the proposed GST rate from nine per cent to seven per cent, the finance committee believed there was room for further reduction.

The committee also called for the harmonization of the federal GST and the provincial sales (E&H) tax, which would result in a single tax collection system, tax base and rate. The Devine government had proposed harmonization of the GST and E&H tax at a combined rate of 14 per cent, but the committee recommended a five per cent rate for the E&H tax.

On the fiscal front, the chamber continued to press for deficit reduction and tax reform. "The repeated refrain has been that deficit

reduction must occur through decreased expenditures, not tax increases," the finance committee said in the annual report.

Eliminating grants and subsidies, selling off Crowns and increasing private participation in government commercial activities were among the committee's recommended solutions to the fiscal crisis.

As the chamber headed into its 45<sup>th</sup> year of operation since its rebirth in 1945, Kish sounded an optimistic note. "I have this tremendous expectation that the next decade will be the most challenging and satisfying of the century," Kish said in her president's report.

Whether the 1990s were the most satisfying decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a matter of opinion, but Kish's prediction that the new decade would be the most challenging was prescient indeed.

In 1990, J.W. (Jim) Yuel, president of Prairie Industrial Chemicals Inc. of Saskatoon, was elected president of the Saskatchewan Chamber and he saw this as a benchmark year ... a year when the direction of the province and the provincial economy turned.

In many respects, Yuel's comments were remarkably prophetic, but it would be many years, if not decades, before they would come to fruition.



**1987 SCC President Sylvia Kish presents 10 year membership plaque to Paul Hill.**



Saskatchewan Delegation address European businessmen 1984



**"I see a new direction forming with a surge of rural industrial development, which will move this province from a dependence on agriculture to a manufacturing and processing export base."**

Jim Yuel, SCC President 1990-91

Meanwhile, the chamber's economic development committee appeared before the Saskatchewan Environmental Assessment Review Commission to argue for the "need to achieve a reasonable balance between environmental protection and economic reality."

The Economic Development Committee was equally busy and had proposed elimination of duplication, harmonization of regulations, clarity and predictability in the application of laws and regulations as a way to simplify and speed up the regulatory process for major projects.

On the equally thorny issue of sale tax reform, the finance committee continued to advocate lowering the GST/PST rate to 4-5 per cent (for a combined rate of 9-10 per cent), and the integration of the PST and

GST to minimize administrative costs to government and business.

On Oct. 21, 1991, the NDP under former attorney-general Roy Romanow defeated the Devine Conservatives after nine years in power. This change would have major consequences for the Saskatchewan business community, and the chamber in particular.

No longer would the chamber have a willing partner in revising taxation, labour and environmental legislation in ways favourable to the business community. Instead, the Romanow government would be fixated on digging the province out of the mountain of deficits and debt accumulated during the Devine years.

That meant significant tax increases, government spending restraint and austerity budgets for much of the first term of office for the Romanow New Democrats. It also meant the end of plans to harmonize the PST with the GST.

Fortunately, the WCB continued to implement the chamber's recommendation to implement merit-based rates, which paid \$9.1 million in rebates to 20,000 employers, while maintaining competitive premium rates for employers.

The SCC's Labour Committee had been actively advocating against a proposed union contractors-only policy on major

projects. It felt that adding such a policy would be in contradiction of the Premier's pledge of 'fair and open tendering' of all government contracts.

"Any policy that would disallow such enterprises from participating in the competitive tendering process cannot possibly be viewed as 'fair and open' and would be extremely harmful to Saskatchewan's reputation in North America," the committee said.

The Economic Development Committee continued its fight against the property assessment process proposed by SAMA and was urging the government to "rationalize the many government departments and agencies currently involved in providing economic development services so that they do so in a cost-effective, high-impact fashion."

The committee added that it would investigate the feasibility of a government-industry partnership, called the Saskatchewan Economic Development Authority. This would be like regional economic development organizations, only provincial in scope.

The following year, the pace of the chamber's lobbying efforts increased, as the new government continued to overhaul labour, environmental, taxation, minimum wage, pay and employment equity legislation, as well as government construction tendering policy.



SCC President 1990-91, Jim Yuel

**Opposite top: SCC Labour Committee meets to discuss final proposals to amend the Trade Union Act 1984.**

**Opposite bottom: Provincial chamber President Marcel de la Gorgondiere and 1st Vice President Will Klein discuss Business Week with Economic Development and Trade Minister Eric Bertson.**

The Economic Development Committee continued to have its hands full, with recommendations to create regional economic development authorities; development of a proposed trade and market development organization; and ongoing environmental issues, like underground storage tanks, environmental liability, and impact assessment criteria. Similarly, the Labour Committee was grappling with changes coming out of the Workers' Compensation Act Review. One proposal would do away with the concept of "deeming," so that an injured worker would receive compensation, not only until the worker was "deemed" to be able to work, but until the worker was actually receiving earnings. The Committee said the WCB changes would impose unnecessary, harmful costs at a time when many businesses were struggling to survive.

The chamber also reiterated its opposition to any increase in the minimum wage, noting that the "current economy cannot support an increase in the minimum wage."

A credit rating downgrade by Standard and Poor's prompted the chamber's Finance Committee to renew calls for the provincial government to redouble its efforts to reduce the deficit. Noting that Saskatchewan has one of the highest personal tax rates among the provinces and the highest debt per capita, "the chamber has been constant in its position of attacking the deficit/debt through reduced expenditures and emphasized that

there is no tolerance for increased taxation."

1993 was another busy year for the chamber and its various committees, with a number of changes being made to labour laws, including Workers' Compensation, Occupational Health and Safety, Trade Union and Labour Standards acts.

"A major focus for the provincial chamber in 1993 has been to deal with proposals to amend labour legislation. In our negotiations, we have lobbied for labour relations legislation that provides an even balance to all stakeholders," MT Watson, SCC President said in his president's report in 1993.

Accordingly, the Labour Committee successfully lobbied the government to spread a proposed 10.5 per cent increase in WCB premium rates over two years instead of one and argued for an Industrial Relations Council to provide consensus recommendations to the government on Trade Union Act changes and "remove politics from labour issues."

The Finance Committee presented the Finance Minister with its report, *The Move from Intensive Care*, the sequel to its 1993 report, *The Financial Wellness Model*, a nod to the NDP's "wellness model" for health care.

The 1994 report called on the government to "stay the course" on deficit reduction,

adding that in the event of any shortfall in projected revenues, "the only option is to reduce government expenditures."

In its pre-budget submission to the Finance Minister, the finance committee conveyed the strong message that the province has "hit the wall in terms of tax increases." On sales tax reform, the committee recommended the government "lower the present tax rate, broaden the base for consumer goods, and to reduce the number of business inputs to which the sales tax is applied."

While the chamber could be critical of the NDP government policy on fiscal matters, labour legislation and environmental regulations, it also helped the government formulate policies that were more "business friendly."

For example, the economic development committee was invited by the government to participate in an initiative to establish a new Saskatchewan trade and market development organization. "It is anticipated that the organization would operate as a one-stop shop to provide a wide range of trade-export services to Saskatchewan companies," the finance committee reported.

This would ultimately become the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership (STEP), a government-industry organization that would be government-funded but able to raise its own funds from

service and membership fees to provide services to its private sector members.

In a similar vein, the chamber took part in the discussions around the development of the Saskatchewan Tourism Authority, another government-industry organization that would have government funding, with the ability to raise its own funds eventually. This entity would become Tourism Saskatchewan, which existed as a public-private partnership from 1994 until it was turned into a treasury board Crown corporation by the Wall government in 2012.

In 1994, the chamber continued its efforts around the deficit, taxes and red tape. Some victories included developing regulations for the Labour Standards Act. Specifically, the chamber pointed out that two provisions, most available hours and benefits for part-time workers, could cause serious problems for employers if scheduling work hours and layoffs were done based on seniority. When the new act was proclaimed in February 1995, the offending sections were dropped, thanks in large measure to the chamber's lobbying efforts.

**Another small, but symbolically significant, win was Finance Minister Janice MacKinnon's introduction of the Balanced Budget Act, legislation the chamber had been calling for since 1986.**

In fact, the Finance Committee praised the NDP government for the progress it had

made on deficit reduction, and supported the government's practice of presenting a financial plan over two or three years to warn departments if reduced funding was planned.

Still, the Finance Committee reiterated the chamber's position in favour of sales tax harmonization and reduced government spending, and in opposition to any tax increases, noting that revenues from taxation had "reached the point of diminishing returns."

The chamber's lobbying efforts were less successful with the Trade Union Act amendments, however. While consensus between business and labour representatives was reached on 16 of 20 contentious issues, the chamber urged the government to form a Saskatchewan Industrial Relations Council to deal with the four outstanding issues.

When the bill was passed in October 1994, without the recommended changes, the chamber expressed "disappointment" and recommended "depoliticizing" the process of developing labour laws.

Similarly, the chamber took issue with the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement, which called for non-union contractors to hire a prescribed number of unionized workers on Crown construction projects. One issue that both the chamber and the provincial government had been concerned about since the 1960s was the lack of job







**“A major focus for the task force is to make Saskatchewan a preferred place to do business with the aboriginal community, and work toward common goals, especially in the area of job creation. Education and skills training were an important part of the partnering process with First Nations and Metis people.”**

SCC 1994 Annual Report

opportunities for Indian and Metis people. In an effort to make progress on this long-standing problem, the chamber formed the Aboriginal Economic Development Task Force.

Environmental issues were also gaining both in number and importance, with the chamber providing input to provincial bodies, like the Waste Management Advisory Group, Saskatchewan Clean Air Strategy Task Force and the Used Oil/Underground Storage Tank Review. Considering the increased importance and sheer numbers of environmental matters, the chamber decided to remove the Environment Task Force from the Economic

Development Committee and establish a separate Environment Committee. The chair of the Environment Committee was Robert Schutzman of IPSCO, who would continue to chair that Committee until the present day.

The year 1995 was very much like any other year in the recent history of the chamber. The chamber and its committees worked hard to represent the interests of the business community by lobbying government, promoting entrepreneurship, and recognizing business achievement.

When the WCB announced its premium rates for 1996, the chamber denounced them as "excessive" and pressed the government to conduct an independent review of the WCB. The province responded by appointing actuarial consultant Bruce Neville to head the independent review and agreed to freeze the rates until the review was complete.

The Neville Report called for the WCB to develop a "new actuarially sound assessment rate model" to be used for setting 1997 premium rates and that "insurance principles must apply to case management" of workplace injury claims.

While endorsing most of the Neville Report's recommendations, the chamber urged the government take the next step and review the compensation system and implement "early intervention" and "early return-to-work" strategies.

On the province's Partnership for Renewal strategy, the chamber was generally supportive of initiatives, such as reduction of the regulatory burden for business and longer-term financial management and debt reduction plans, which had been recommended by the chamber.

The government's move to have the Provincial Action Committee on the Economy (PACE), an industry-government advisory board, assess the competitiveness of Saskatchewan's business climate was also applauded by the chamber.

The chamber also approved of the government's plan to give 45 days' notice of any utility rate increase and the introduction of the Balanced Budget Act, which was a "long-standing position of the chamber."

But the chamber urged the government to go beyond balancing the budget over a four-year period and aim for balanced budgets annually. In addition, the chamber suggested that the government should start to pay down the provincial debt.

Finally, the chamber supported the government's plan announced in the spring budget to review the province's taxation system to "assess its fairness and effectiveness."

While disappointed with the pace of debt reduction, the chamber praised the government for heeding its warnings about

Saskatchewan's high tax levels, and not announcing any new taxes in the budget.

"My belief in our organization's ability to effect change and in our future potential is not based on blind faith. It is based on our many achievements, some of which are described in this report," said SCC President James Glass of Athabaska Airways Ltd., said in the 1996 annual report.

One of those achievements Glass referred to was the reduction in the provincial sales tax (PST) from nine per cent to seven per cent in the 1996-97 budget, which the chamber had advocated for several years. The budget also saw targeted tax incentives for the hog industry and other livestock operations, as well as the Manufacturing and Processing Investment Tax Credit, due largely to the chamber's lobbying efforts.

Another 'win' for the chamber was the government's regulatory reform initiative, which would see the introduction of a "zero sum" regulatory policy that would reduce red tape for small and medium-sized businesses. In 1996-97 fiscal year, the regulatory reform policy was expected to reduce red tape by 116 regulations, or 16 per cent.

On the subject of tax reform, the chamber urged the NDP government to close the competitiveness gap with Alberta by implementing a "fair and equitable taxation system" that will allow Saskatchewan business to compete on a "level playing field."



**Top: Bob Schutzman at an Environment Committee Meeting in 1997.**

**Opposite: Finance Committee News Conference with Brian Kinder, Peter Stephenson and Casey Davis.**





**Top left: SCC AGM 1997.**

**Top right: Labour Committee meeting, 1997.**

In 1997, change and competitiveness seemed to be the watch words of the provincial chamber.

For example, the chamber said that "Saskatchewan Crowns must continue to evolve and change to meet the needs of the people of Saskatchewan in a dynamic, competitive global market."

That was the gist of the chamber's submission to the Talking About Saskatchewan Crowns (TASC) subcommittee, which was created to provide direction to the NDP government on its stable of Crown corporations going into the new decade.

The chamber cited the Competitiveness Task Force report by the Provincial Action Committee on the Economy (PACE), which identified three goals to improve



Saskatchewan's business climate: identify and eliminate cost barriers to competitiveness, become "attitude competitive," and identify and build on provincial advantages.

The chamber supported the government's use of "targeted tax incentives and royalty restructuring" to improve the province's competitiveness, but noted the province was "not focused on the underlying elements," such as major reform of the business and personal income tax systems.

In its pre-budget submission, the Finance Committee advised the government that "meaningful personal tax reductions" were required to attract and retain skilled employees, increase consumption, create jobs and stimulate economic growth.

The chamber's Environment Committee noted that the federal government's plans

to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by six per cent below 1990 levels by 2010, which was agreed to at the Kyoto summit, are "not realistic."

Energy-producing provinces, like Saskatchewan, would be hard hit, and the hardest hit would be energy companies, like SaskPower, which produces 70 per cent of its electricity by coal-fired plants, the Environment Committee added.

Crown corporations continued to be a major focus of the chamber in 1998. SCC President Lloyd Boutilier said the chamber "endorses a change in the ownership structure of certain Crown corporations in order to ease the tax burden on the taxpayers of Saskatchewan."

For example, the chamber encouraged the sale of SaskTel "in order to remove the

barriers to its competitiveness in the global telecommunications market."

Working together, the Finance and Economic Development Committees pressed the provincial government to forge an integrated fiscal/economic 'action plan' to include broad-based tax reductions.

The committees urged the government to use a co-operative approach when building transportation infrastructure, as well as communications systems, to ensure Saskatchewan can compete in the global marketplace.

Value-added manufacturing and processing was promoted because an economy based on harvesting our natural resources was no longer viable, while cutting red tape was encouraged to attract investors and entrepreneurs, develop innovations and increase business volumes.

The Labour Committee continued its heavy lifting on the WCB file, specifically its effort to obtain information on how the WCB financed the operations of the Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) division and Department of Labour operations.

The Environment Committee continued to struggle with the Kyoto Protocol, specifically its impact on "each and every Saskatchewan business, and each and every man, woman and child. If implementation goes ahead as planned –

this province will bear the brunt of national change because of the energy-intensive nature of our economy," the committee said in the 1998 annual report.

As the province prepared to enter a new century, the chamber embarked on one of its most ambitious initiatives, *Action Saskatchewan: A Blueprint for 2005*. President Stan Schmidt of Global Television in Saskatoon, said the objective of *Action Saskatchewan* was to "position Saskatchewan for long-term economic growth."

Over the winter of 1999-2000, a series of town hall meetings were held followed by more than 25 focus groups involving as many stakeholders as possible. Out of those meetings and focus groups emerged a plan that would send out a positive sign that Saskatchewan is open for business.

"We didn't leave it to governments. That's the old way, the way of megaprojects, handouts and bailouts. The new way is take greater responsibility for our own economic future and do it from the local level because we, as the business community, are a major part of the solution," said Schmidt.

As part of *Action Saskatchewan*, the chamber identified barriers that could impede the growth of Saskatchewan's enterprise, such as regulatory burdens. The chamber gathered input from the business community on key areas, such as taxation, labour, education and investment, and identified areas of

weakness and strength, such as transportation, communications, social infrastructure; marketing and investment, regulation, legislation and taxation, environmental issues and workforce development and retention.

From that information gathering process, a "plan of action" was developed, which included specific goals and strategies from each committee.

Particular credit for the success of *Action Saskatchewan* go to Larry Hiles, Mark McLeod and Craig Zawada from the chamber board, the scores of volunteers, and the hundreds of individuals who offered input. Paul Martin and Clare Kirkland were brought on board to coordinate the process and write the final action plan.

"There are no quick fixes – but we have made progress toward our goals," Schmidt said in his president's report. "I suggest we focus on the processes that will position us to succeed... as we move forward in the 21st Century."

Certainly, there were no quick fixes, but the early years of the new millennium would bring some much-needed reforms to the province's taxation system, largely due to the chamber's relentless lobbying efforts.



**Mary Ann McFayden, SCC Executive Director until 2007.**





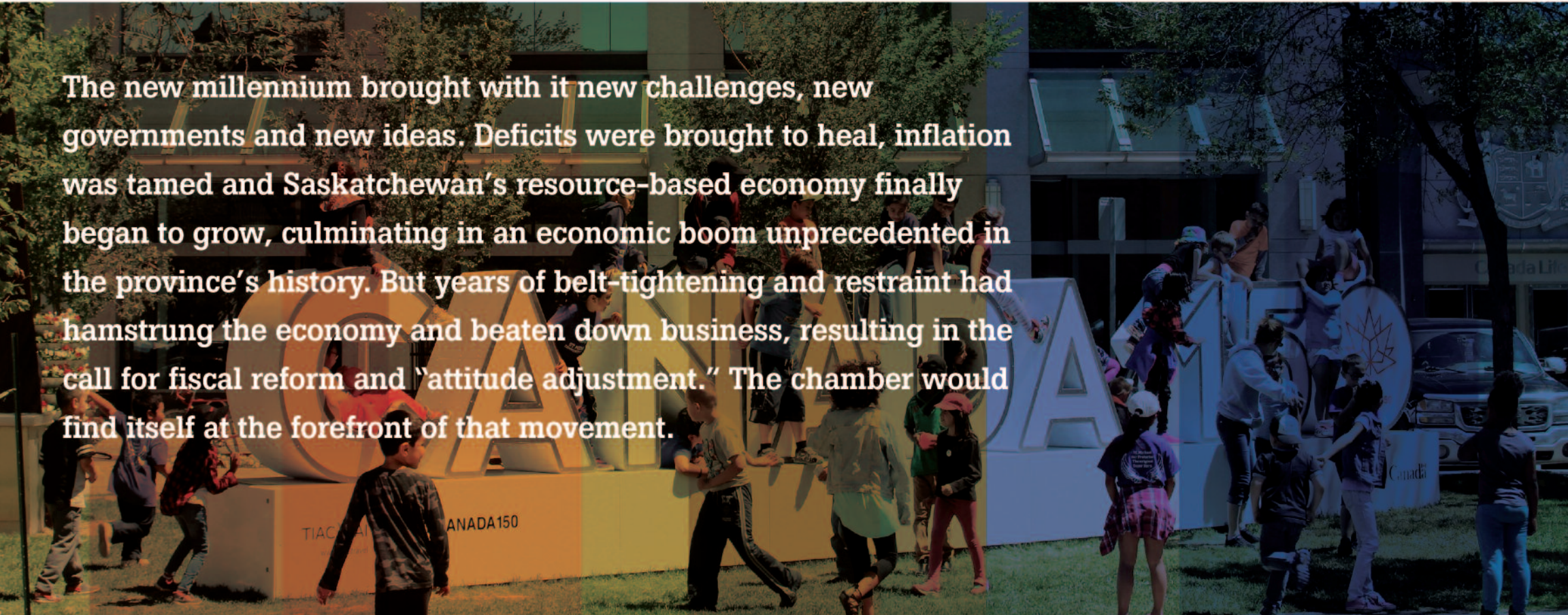






# New century, new challenges: The 2000s & 2010s

The new millennium brought with it new challenges, new governments and new ideas. Deficits were brought to heel, inflation was tamed and Saskatchewan's resource-based economy finally began to grow, culminating in an economic boom unprecedented in the province's history. But years of belt-tightening and restraint had hamstrung the economy and beaten down business, resulting in the call for fiscal reform and "attitude adjustment." The chamber would find itself at the forefront of that movement.





#### ISSUES OF THE DAY:

- Provincial income tax
- Provincial sales tax
- Corporate income tax and property taxes
- Skilled labour shortage
- Red tape
- Hours of work
- PST and GST harmonization
- Review of the K-12 education system

The new millennium brought new challenges for the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce. New (and newly re-elected) governments and new premiers required new approaches and new attitudes from the chamber.

In 2000, president T.G. (Casey) Davis, a Saskatoon lawyer, spoke about the need for an attitude adjustment in the province, which had come through a long period of

sluggish economic and population growth, government austerity and a 'bunker mentality' among business community.

"Improving the attitude of all people in the province is a major endeavour, one that we all recognize as the first step in making Saskatchewan a leader in economic growth," Davis said in the 2000 annual report.

Along with fostering a change in attitude through the *Action Saskatchewan* initiative, the chamber also needed to continue its focus on legislative and regulatory issues.

"We are all aware that change will take place," Davis said. "What we need to do is drive the change by recognizing the realities of our economy and taking proactive steps to lead through them."

*Action Saskatchewan Version 2.0* highlighted four sectors as key to the province's future economic growth: value-added agriculture or agri-value, biotechnology, tourism and transportation.

The chamber's five committees – Finance, Economic Development, Education, Environment and Labour – all played a role

in turning *Action Saskatchewan Version 2.0* from a blueprint into a working plan of action.

In addition to working on *Action Saskatchewan*, the chamber's legislative lobbying efforts continued unabated in the year 2000.

The WCB also came in for criticism from the Labour Committee on administrative issues, such as the claims process, rate-setting methods and its inability to measure the effectiveness of programs, like early intervention. The committee noted that an experience rating system would help bring rates down, reducing the need for annual rebates and payout of excess funds back to employers.

Having successfully lobbied the NDP government for changes to the personal income tax system, the Finance Committee set its sights on business taxes, specifically small business tax, in 2000. "The main creator of jobs is small business, and our small business tax rate is the second-worst in Canada," said Norm Halldorson, Finance Committee chair.





Top left: Political Forum 1978

Centre: Board Members met with new Saskatchewan Liberal Party Leader Ralph Goodale at the 1981 Political Forum

Top right: Premier Lorne Calvert at Political Forum 2006

Bottom left: Premier Brad Wall at Political Forum 2014

Bottom right: Premier Scott Moe at Political Forum 2018



**But Finance Minister Eric Cline was clearly listening to the committee's pre-budget submission, as his spring budget reduced the small business tax rate from eight to six per cent, effective July 1, 2001, while the income threshold above which the tax rate applied was raised from \$200,000 to \$300,000 on Jan. 1, 2002.**

While pleased with the small business tax cut, the committee expressed disappointment that there was no three-year plan to reduce general business taxes, similar to the personal income tax cuts announced in the previous year's budget. In 2001, the chamber continued developing its strategic plan to ensure the future vitality of the province through the *Action Saskatchewan* initiative. The chamber also helped develop local action committees to spread the message of *Action Saskatchewan* across the province, as well as engage the public, stakeholders and business leaders in the *Action Saskatchewan* Leadership Forum. The purpose of the forum was to reach some consensus on growing the province's private sector, capitalizing on demographics and growing the population in the province.

While *Action Saskatchewan* was expanding its scope, the chamber was amalgamating the Economic Development and Finance committees into the investment and Growth Committee due to an increasing overlap in focus between the two committees.

The Environment Committee continued its broadside attack on the Kyoto Protocol. "Kyoto is a seriously flawed approach that is not going to solve our problem with climate change," environment committee chair Bob Schutzman said in the 2001 annual report.

The committee lobbied federal and provincial officials to refrain from ratifying the Kyoto Protocol until they had conducted more thorough evaluation and consultation and developed a better scientific understanding of climate change.

The challenges and changes kept coming in 2002, but the chamber was well prepared with various *Action Saskatchewan* activities, such as developing a report card to measure the progress achieved in reaching the initiative's targets and goals of growing the private sector, the workforce and the population.

Another *Action Saskatchewan* initiative was to develop a human resources strategy for the province. In May 2002, the Labour and Education Committee launched its human resources plan to better match the workforce with the workplace, to meet the learning needs of Aboriginal people, ensure all students learn workplace skills, and build partnerships with business, the education system, and governments.

In years past, the Finance Committee had successfully lobbied government for

reductions in corporate capital and income tax rates, and Employment Insurance premiums. Additional advocacy wins for the Saskatchewan business community were increases to registered pension and retirement savings plan contribution limits and the small business deduction limit to \$300,000.

In 2002, the Finance Committee lobbied for changes to the property tax assessment system, more venture capital and foreign investment opportunities, and lobbied against the negative impact of the Air Security Charge on Saskatchewan.

The Investment and Growth Committee advised government to remove restrictions on farm land ownership and to reduce red tape and border restrictions that impeded the free-flowing trade corridor with the U.S.

The economy, which had been stuck in low gear for years, showed more signs of life in 2003. The chamber's *Action Saskatchewan* report card showed that private sector growth was generally positive, population growth had stabilized and stopped shrinking, and the labour force continued to grow, especially in the youth, seniors and rural segments.

Chamber president Clay Dowling, president of Ghost Transportation Services of Saskatoon, told chamber members "now is the time to take action to make this province a better place to live, work and invest."



**"Not coming from Saskatchewan and not born and raised here, the negative attitude was probably the largest challenge I dealt with moving here in the 1980s. The attitude was government's role was to solve people's problems whereas the people's role is to solve their problems..."**

**"I was just pointing out to people, hey, you're responsible. And that's what Action Saskatchewan was designed to do was to create awareness that, if you've got a problem, you solve it."**

Clay Dowling  
SCC President, 2003-2004





"A turning point in changing the attitude of Saskatchewan people, was when the chamber pushed hard for business and personal income tax reform in Saskatchewan. When the NDP government of the day appointed U of S accounting dean and former senior financial department official Jack Vicq to head a tax review commission, the chamber got behind its recommendations, which were implemented for the most part."

Ted Hillstead  
SCC President, 2005-2006

**The newly formed Human Resources Committee (formerly the Labour Committee) took a strong stand against proposed rate changes and legislative amendments for the WCB. "These amendments will have huge implications for the province of Saskatchewan in terms of future growth and our image as a 'business friendly' environment," said committee chair Mike Carr.**

In July, 2003, the *Action Saskatchewan* steering committee was formed to come up with themes or objectives to achieve certain goals and objectives. These themes included growing the private sector, developing good public management, increasing the wealth of the people, turning Aboriginal demographics from a challenge to an opportunity, and changing attitudes.

In December, the Finance Committee conducted its annual pre-budget survey of chamber members, which indicated dissatisfaction with the levels of provincial income tax, provincial sales tax, corporate income tax and property taxes. Over half of

the respondents indicated that they did not feel that Saskatchewan had a climate for economic investment.

In its pre-budget submission, the Finance Committee renewed its call for business tax reform, specifically lowering the provincial sales tax (PST) by one or two per cent and removed entirely from capital projects.

The Investment and Growth Committee conducted its own survey of public and private stakeholders, which determined that Saskatchewan's key weaknesses were a shortage of skilled labour, taxation levels, inability to attract entrepreneurs and excessive red tape. The committee urged the government to review the corporate tax structure and identify ways to achieve parity with neighbouring jurisdictions in order to prevent the exodus of successful business and wealth creators, while at the same time developing a strategy to attract investment.

*Action Saskatchewan: A Blueprint for 2005*, the economic development strategy initiated by the chamber in 1999, was the main preoccupation of the chamber throughout most of 2004.

At a board of directors meeting in March, director Craig Zawada provided the board with an update on Version 3.0, noting that the major themes, such as concerns about economic and population growth, attitude and resistance to change, were still evident in the latest version of *Action Saskatchewan*.

"*Action Saskatchewan* is a generational project, with the challenge being to maintain the momentum behind it. It will be far more important to take the *Action Saskatchewan* message outside of the chamber and get people to buy into it," said Zawada.

At a board meeting in October, director Ralph Boychuk of Prince Albert provided a brief summary of the most recent *Action Saskatchewan* report card, noting that the province's population had risen for the first time in seven years due to increased in-migration.

The long-awaited Business Tax Review, the heated battle over most available hours of work legislation and the *Action Saskatchewan* summit, known as *The Gathering* in Saskatoon in October, were the main issues on the chamber's plate in 2005.

The controversy over the available hours of work actually began in the fall of 2004 when NDP Labour Minister Deb Higgins dusted off some amendments to the Labour Standards Act that were passed, but never enacted, by the Romanow government in 1994.

The legislation would require employers to offer additional hours of work – due to termination, resignation or temporary absence of an employee – to the most senior, qualified part-time employee. The

bill would cover workplaces with 50 employees or more.

But the chamber pointed out the legislation would affect more than two-thirds of the employed workforce and half the part-time workers. Moreover, employers would lose their ability to use part-time workers to cover peak demand periods, if they weren't emergencies or unexpected increases in workload.

More importantly, employers would be forced to offer additional hours of work to the most senior, rather than the most qualified workers, including students and Aboriginal part-time workers. The fact that no other jurisdiction in North America had such legislation was seen as another disincentive to invest in the province.

After a concerted lobbying effort by the business community, including the chamber and the opposition Saskatchewan Party, Higgins backed down and pulled the legislation in February, 2005.

On the other hand, the Finance Committee endorsed the report of Business Tax Review committee, which was headed by former Associate Deputy Minister of Finance, assistant dean of the College of Commerce and retired accounting professor, Jack Vicq.

In November, 2005, Vicq recommended the province reduce corporate income tax (CIT) rates, eliminate corporate capital taxes altogether and harmonize the PST with the

GST. Under Vicq's plan, Saskatchewan's business tax burden would fall from second-highest, at 117 per cent of the national average in 2005, to 53 per cent in 2008, within 'spitting distance' of Alberta.

**With the notable exception of sales tax harmonization, the Calvert government eventually implemented most of the Vicq committee's recommendations. And the chamber could rightly take much of the credit, having lobbied for business tax reform for decades.**

As the economy began to pick up speed in the mid-2000s, another obstacle threatened to put the brakes on the province's nascent economic recovery: the shortage of labour, especially skilled workers.

In the 2006 annual report, chamber president Ralph Boychuk alluded to the problem of finding, training and retaining labour in a province that had lost generations of workers to other provinces. "The labour shortage is putting pressure on every industry in Saskatchewan," said Boychuk, a senior manager with RBC Financial Group in Prince Albert. The chamber's approach to the labour shortage was simple: make workplaces friendlier and more welcoming to youth and Aboriginal people.

To that end, the chamber launched the Youth Friendly Workplace Designation program (YFWD) in September 2006. The YFWD program aimed to help employers

create more youth-friendly work environments so they can attract and retain young employees.

Another chamber initiative was designed to create more Aboriginal-friendly workplaces. The chamber hosted two Aboriginal Awareness sessions, which helped employers understand Aboriginal culture and expectations and aimed to assist employers in creating welcoming workplaces for members of the Aboriginal community.

Meanwhile, the province's economy and population growth were showing signs of life after a decade-long slump. The *Action Saskatchewan* report card noted that the provincial population had now registered two consecutive increases.

The report card, compiled by Sask Trends Monitor's Doug Elliott, attributed the population increase to a "surge in the number of people moving to or returning to the province, rather than a drop in the number who are leaving."

In addition, the report card said that the employment rate was increasing among younger and older people, those with lower levels of education and Aboriginal youth.

In a pre-budget consultation with Finance Minister Andrew Thomson, the Finance Committee urged him to implement the Business Tax Review committee's recommendations to harmonize the PST



**"The Board's objective with the growth strategy was to put forward a plan that would give a guideline for the private sector to parallel the efforts of the public sector and set key goals. We knew that the population was a critical one. When we said 1.5 million by 2030, people at the time said that will never happen, but now it is. We also said we need to grow to that 1.5 million target. So what do we need to do to get to those indicators? Housing, educational, all of those important measures as a community were integrated into the growth strategy. I think it was a brilliant plan."**

Steve McLellan  
SCC CEO, 2007-present





**"It had a lot to do with the Brad Wall's government that sort of put Saskatchewan on the map, so to speak. People were optimistic. There was a feeling of pride of being in Saskatchewan. Successful people used to have to hide their success in Saskatchewan. I think that's changed."**

Patricia Warsaba  
SCC Chair 2017-2018

with the GST and further reduce the PST rate, as well as reduce in the personal income tax (PIT) rate.

As part of a coalition of business, taxpayer and local government associations, the chamber also pressed the government to reduce the education portion of property taxes by lowering the percentage paid by property taxpayers from 55 to 40 per cent over three years.

The Youth, Education and Training Committee launched the Saskatchewan Business Mentorship Institute (BMI). "BMI is designed to provide an opportunity for successful businesses to assume a mentorship role that allows them to provide advice and guidance to emergent businesses with related issues and concerns," said the YET Committee's report.

The Environment Committee redoubled its efforts to reduce federal-provincial duplication and overlap of regulations and resolve interjurisdictional issues. The committee would like to see the implementation of a single-window regulatory system for environmental issues.

At the chamber's Political Forum in October, Premier Lorne Calvert promised to reform the property tax system, boost support for the uranium industry and increase investment in the North, while the Saskatchewan Party leader Brad Wall unveiled a "180-day plan" to fully implement the Business Tax Review

recommendations, reform labour legislation and implement a growth agenda.

The following year, the electors would pass judgment on the promises made by each party during the provincial election in November 2007.

With the new year came a new government to replace the 15-year-old NDP administration, a new CEO for the chamber, and a new economic development strategy to replace *Action Saskatchewan*.

In the 2007 annual report, chamber president Dave Dutchak noted that *Action Saskatchewan* had come to an end in 2005. "This coupled with the huge momentum swing in our province in 2006 meant a new plan was needed: one that built on the foundation of *Action Saskatchewan* but took us further."

As a result, the chamber launched its Sustainable Growth Strategy in 2007. The Growth Strategy was designed to help the province overcome challenges and barriers to sustained economic growth. A number of targets were set for various indicators, including population, demographics, labour force and GDP growth. In this Sustainable Growth Strategy, it projected that by 2030 the province would need to have a population of 1.5 million.

The new Saskatchewan Party government led by Premier Brad Wall, a former economic development officer in Swift

Current and ministerial aide during the Devine years, also promised big changes for the province's business community.

**"The change in government has also opened a lot of new doors and the 'Voice of Business' is being heard louder and clearer than ever before," said Dave Dutchak, president and CEO of MD Ambulance Care of Saskatoon.**

Also new to the chamber was CEO Steve McLellan, who spent 18 years with Tourism Regina and Tourism Saskatchewan and 11 years in the hospitality industry, mainly as a restaurant owner and manager. McLellan replaced the retiring Mary Ann McFadyen, who oversaw the chamber's evolution from a regional office of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce to an independent, strong and respected voice for business in the province.

In McLellan's view, 2007 marked the "coming of age" for Saskatchewan, with the election of a new pro-business government, an economic resurgence and a newfound

confidence in the province's business community.

But with economic growth came challenges, namely a shortage of skilled labour and the suddenly booming housing market. The plan to increase the population by roughly 50 per cent in less than 25 years would put pressure on other systems, such as education and training institutions, housing and public infrastructure and the chamber put its efforts behind advocating that action be taken to address areas that would be of concern in the future.

Property tax reform was at the top of the agenda for the Finance Committee, noting that 72 per cent of chamber members rated it their highest priority. The committee took issue with the existing tax rebate system, which was conveyed to MLA Jim Reiter, who was conducting a review of the property tax system.

In a pre-budget meeting with Finance Minister Rod Gantefoer in January 2008, the Finance Committee urged the new government to implement the second phase of the Business Tax Review Committee's recommendations, namely the harmonization of the PST with the GST.

The Youth, Education and Training Committee called for a full review of the province's K-12 education system, based on a survey showing that nearly 80 per cent of chamber members believed students did

not have the workplace skills, knowledge and abilities employers expect.

The Human Resources Committee applauded the new Saskatchewan Party government for passing Bill 6, which amended the Trade Union Act to require secret ballot votes for union certification and decertification and allow employers to communicate directly with employees during organizing drives.

Bill 6 also contained provisions to determine essential services for public sector employees, which the committee considered necessary legislation to ensure the orderly delivery of services in the event of a work disruption. The changes to the Trade Union Act were upheld, but the essential services legislation was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of Canada in 2015 and had to be substantially rewritten.

If 2007 was the year the economy started gathering speed, 2008 was the year the economy took off, fuelled by higher prices for most of Saskatchewan's commodity exports.

**CEO Steve McLellan told the directors that he had met with Enterprise and Innovation Minister Lyle Stewart and Enterprise Saskatchewan CEO Dale Botting about the chamber's Growth Strategy Task Force and reported great support to move forward with the task force.**

At a board of directors meeting in May, outgoing chamber chair Dave Dutchak reported that he had met with Premier Brad Wall and they agreed the chamber and the government "needed to work together to grow Saskatchewan and work on bettering some areas like education and health."

In his first-year report in September, CEO Steve McLellan noted the confluence of positive indicators, including strong economic and population growth, low unemployment and high labour force participation rates.

"While the past year has been one of significant growth for most sectors in the province and while I cannot take any credit for that growth, I truly believe that the Saskatchewan Chamber can," McLellan said, citing the chamber's *Action Saskatchewan*, the Sustainable Growth strategy and advocacy work to lower taxes, reduce red tape and encourage entrepreneurship.

In December of 2008, Dutchak outlined his plan for the Growth Strategy Task Force, which included holding forums on three main topics: housing, workforce and health. The chamber also planned to hold a Growth Summit in fall of 2009 or spring of 2010.

As it turned out, 2008 would be the last year of significant growth for the provincial economy in the decade, as the global financial crisis in late 2008 would trigger a



**"I wanted to be part of the chamber because it showed the integration and inclusiveness of First Nations businesses and business leaders into the provincial business community. It really showed that when we're on the same playing field, we're equal in a lot of ways. There's still a lot of work to be done. For aboriginal businesses, there are still lots of supports that are needed. But, at the end of the day, it showed that we're at the table and we're discussing matters that need to be discussed."**

Richard Ahenakew  
SCC President, 2010 – 2011





"The Saskatchewan chamber is a very important organization, and here's why I think it's important. One is the chamber needs to be that objective voice. What's happening right now is the polarization of ideologies in politics. Not necessarily focusing on the issues, but focusing on populist voter around those issues. There's so much space for an organization like the chamber to come up in the centre and be that trusted voice."

Valerie Sluth  
SCC Chair, 20019-2020

collapse of commodity prices and recession in 2009.

Indeed, the provincial economy took a sharp nose dive in 2009, posting gross domestic product (GDP) of \$55.6 billion, compared with \$65.4 billion in 2008, a decline of nearly 15 per cent, according to Statistics Canada.

But 2009 chamber chair Holly Hetherington, observed that the provincial economy and the government's finances seemed to be weathering the storm that was swamping the global economy.

In her Chair's report, Hetherington reflected on the "whirlwind that started with a global recession and ended with the province tabling the only balanced budget in the country, and industry signalling billions of dollars of major capital projects in the pipeline."

In his CEO report, McLellan agreed that 2009 "was a good year for Saskatchewan business and great year for the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce. The world economic challenges were felt by many businesses but in most cases were a slowdown, versus a major reversal, of fortunes."

Certainly, the 2009-10 year was a busy one for the chamber, which saw the tabling of "Right People, Right Place, Right Time: Saskatchewan's Labour Market Strategy," the release of the Growth Strategy Task

Force's community growth "toolkit" and submissions to the Provincial Panel on Student Achievement that advocated a new model for education in the province.

**McLellan also noted that the chamber's Environment Committee was instrumental in helping develop a new model for environment regulatory practices, while the Human Resources Committee's work to level the labour relations environment and remove working age restrictions were "big wins for business."**

The Youth, Education and Training (YET) Committee successfully lobbied the government to commit to improve the province's low student achievement record and the Finance Committee saw the fruits of its lobbying efforts reflected in the March 2010 budget, which saw a reduction in the size of government.

Dave Dutchak, chair of the Growth Strategy Task Force, reported two major achievements in 2009: the release of the community growth "toolkits" to 80 communities and a significant improvement in terms of population growth. In October 2009, Saskatchewan's population hit 1,034,974, a record high and just 9,700 people short of the growth strategy's target for 2009.

Ahenakew, general manager of the Northern Lights Casino in Prince Albert and a member of the Ahtahkakoop First Nation,

downplayed the distinction of being the first Indigenous person in Canada to lead a provincial chamber of commerce.

"It's not that Aboriginal people haven't been involved in business. There have been many successful First Nations entrepreneurs and Metis entrepreneurs," Ahenakew told *The Regina Leader-Post* following his election at the annual meeting in Prince Albert in May.

**With the election of Richard Ahenakew as chair in 2010, the chamber marked another milestone in its 90-year history: the first Indigenous leader of a provincial chamber in Canada.**

"The role (of Aboriginal people) can have an impeding or accelerating impact on how the province does. We need everyone pulling together, succeeding and moving forward," Richard Ahenakew.

On the positive side, the province led the nation in employment income growth at 60 per cent from 2000 to 2010, while being the only province to maintain a budget surplus during the recession.

The chamber's tax reform project, *A Change Today for Your Tomorrow*, developed in partnership with the Canada West Foundation and four other business and professional associations, would establish a strong foundation for the province's future growth. The comprehensive review of Saskatchewan's tax environment called for reductions in education and municipal property taxes, personal income tax, corporation income and capital taxes and, once again, sales tax harmonization.

The Youth, Education and Training (YET) Committee looked at the primary and secondary education system and developed a discussion paper called *Student First*, which highlighted some of the opportunities Saskatchewan would miss if the K-12 system did not operate more effectively.

With 2011 being an election year, both federally and provincially, the chamber had to work extra hard to get the attention of government and opposition parties preoccupied with their respective campaigns.

Nevertheless, chamber chair Pat Friesen reported the chamber had a number of successes in the area of advocacy, particularly in the area of youth financial literacy and entrepreneurship. Friesen, a senior executive with Innovation Credit Union in Swift Current, said the chamber lobbied the government to create a youth financial literacy program for the K-12

education curriculum, which had been a long-standing policy of the chamber.

During 2011, the chamber undertook the *On Track Saskatchewan* campaign, a \$250,000 advertising campaign to counteract the negative, anti-business, anti-growth campaign of the labour groups. However, the chamber's proposed tax reform was encountering some resistance from the newly re-elected Saskatchewan Party government.

"The strategic push towards tax reform based on the tax plan partnership continues, ... but progress is slow, with no visible master plan by the province," McLellan said in his CEO's report.

Of the seven recommendations from the Tax Plan, only one – reducing the education portion of property taxes for residential and non-residential taxpayers – had been implemented to date.

The Environment Committee continued its work toward implementation of the new environmental management model and code for Saskatchewan. But the committee raised concerns about a proposed "super agency" for water management, arguing the functions of water supply, water and wastewater treatment, irrigation and drainage should be separate from the regulatory functions, which should remain with the Ministry of Environment.

While 2012 marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the sinking of the *Titanic*, it was full steam

ahead for the chamber under the leadership of 2012 chair Fred Titanich, president and CEO of CAA Saskatchewan.

Titanich noted that several chamber recommendations were incorporated into the new *Employment Act* and labour legislation changes, while the general corporation tax rate had been reduced in the spring budget from 12 per cent to 10 per cent, more or less in line with the chamber's tax reform plan.

In his CEO's report, McLellan pointed out Saskatchewan was leading the nation in almost every economic indicator in 2012. He said the chamber's Growth Strategy in 2007 set out a series of indicators the province had to meet to ensure its economic growth was sustainable, specifically growing to 1.5 million population by 2030, an annual increase of 1.75 per cent.

By 2012 the province was exceeding that percentage growth rate and as a result, there were more people living here than at any time in history.

The chamber's ambitious tax reform plan, launched in 2010, was moving forward, but there was work to be done on getting it implemented. An update on the tax reform plan acknowledged that only two out of seven major recommendations had been implemented, either in whole or part.

The education portion of property taxes had been reduced significantly, but the promise



SCC CEO Steve McLellan



Immigration Forum, 2018





**Left: Deputy Ministers at the 2018  
Chair's Invitational Dinner**

**Right: SCC chair Randy Beattie at the  
2015 Chair's Invitational Dinner**



of property tax reform – capping taxation of non-residential properties at 1.43 of residential properties – was not yet fulfilled.

Similarly, the general corporation tax rate had been lowered from 13 to 10 per cent (versus nine per cent under the tax reform plan) and small business tax from 4.5 to 2 per cent (versus three per cent under the tax plan).

The Investment and Growth Committee created the Northern Business Task Force to encourage development of the North and enhance quality of life for northern residents. The task force would meet in 2013-14 to develop a plan for infrastructure and economic development.

The Human Resources Committee developed five policies for the chamber's AGM in 2013, including the importance of

making Aboriginal education and skills training a priority, while the Finance Committee promoted the concept of a heritage fund for the province.

The committee, which met with Finance Minister Ken Krawetz in December, praised the 2013-14 budget for its balanced budget and lower expenditure growth. But, with respect to the tax reform plan, the committee acknowledged a challenging budget meant delays in implementing the recommendations, though welcoming the improvements in the property tax.

"The year 2013 will be remembered in Saskatchewan for many things but most likely... the Riders' home field Grey Cup win and the bumper crop. The Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce may not have won a Grey Cup, but we won a lot of games, and had a bumper crop of policy wins," CEO

McLellan remarked in the 2013 annual report.

Specifically, forward movement on the Environmental Code and the Employment Code were big wins for the chamber. With nearly 60 current policies on the books and a solid advocacy program, the chamber helped inform government, and promoted its work for business.

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, the chamber should have been very flattered by the 2013 launch of the provincial government's *Saskatchewan Plan for Growth – Vision 2020 and Beyond*. As chamber chair Marion Ghiglione pointed out in the 2013 annual report, the province's growth plan "paralleled our Sustainable Growth Strategy. The Voice of Saskatchewan business – the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce – had been heard."

Aside from P3s, the Investment and Growth Committee talked a lot about productivity, including productivity seminars to encourage and assist the business community and the government to adopt productivity measures.

The Human Resources Committee conducted a survey of members and found that an overwhelming number were concerned about a shortage of skilled and unskilled workers and issues around immigration, specifically hiring immigrant workers.

The Youth, Education and Training (YET) committee was reinstated after a brief hiatus to focus on youth entrepreneurship, including the Aboriginal Youth Educational Project, a program to encourage and train young Aboriginal entrepreneurs.

The YET committee also met with Ministry of Education, Saskatchewan Teachers Federation and Saskatchewan School Boards Association officials regarding the chamber's Student First initiative, which was designed to "unify and reorient the education system around what matters most – the student."

The Finance Committee gave its support to the Saskatchewan Futures Fund plan proposed by former U of S president Peter MacKinnon, which called for government to set aside any excess or 'windfall' resource revenues for debt repayment or the heritage fund or both.

As for the 2014-15 budget, the committee was pleased with the balanced budget, use of summary financial statements (which included all government spending and revenues, including Crowns) and lower expenditure growth. But the committee noted the province delayed promised corporate income tax changes.

The year 2014 was another busy one for the chamber, which hosted three policy events, released several studies and reports, and developed numerous policy positions and recommendations at four policy round tables.

**The HR committee celebrated a significant win, with the distribution of \$79 million in rebates to employers in 2015 by the Workers' Compensation Board following years of lobbying by the provincial chamber.**

The chamber also commended the province for the adoption of the Environmental Code for Saskatchewan, largely due to the persistent lobbying efforts of the Environment Committee over the previous 10 years.

Going to the polls seemed to be a recurring theme in 2015-16, as the chamber dealt with two elections in less than six months: a federal election in October 2015 and a provincial election in April 2016. Nevertheless, the chamber kept its sights on the advocacy role the organization has

played in the province since its inception 95 years ago.

"Despite the fact that we had a federal election and a provincial election, the chamber has remained focused on the long term for our members and the province, while being active in both elections," 2015 chair Randy Beattie, President of PFM Capital Inc., said in the annual report.

Beattie said the chamber's new policy development process seemed to pay dividends in its first year, which was especially important in a year when two elections occurred.

The Youth, Education and Training Committee saw great success in the area of financial literacy, including hosting a forum in November, 2015 for Financial Literacy Month featuring a presentation by Jane Rooney, the federal government's financial literacy leader.

The forum led to the formation of the Saskatchewan Financial Literacy Network, which was developing a website to serve as a "one-stop portal" for anyone seeking information on financial literacy.

With the election of a federal Liberal majority government in 2015, the chamber was faced with the possibility of a carbon tax being imposed on Saskatchewan.

In fact, 2016 chamber chair Shawna Nelson, director of sales and marketing for



Immigration Forum, 2008.





**Indigenous Engagement Charter launch and signing ceremony held in 2020 at the First Nations University in Regina.**

the Sheraton Cavalier Hotel in Saskatoon, called the carbon tax "the new dirty word!"

"Yes, we are against the imposition of carbon tax," Nelson said in the chair's report. But she added, "it's our responsibility and obligation to our membership to know the full course of actions available if one is put in place." Accordingly, two of the chamber's five expert committees were engaged in carbon tax projects in 2016.

Following a survey of chamber members conducted in November 2016, the negative response to carbon pricing came through loud and clear.

"While the vast majority of respondents concluded that reducing carbon emissions was important, almost three quarters opposed the use of carbon pricing... as the

mechanism to achieve such reductions," the Environment Committee said in its report.

Instead, the committee established the Energy Efficiency Taskforce to advance the implementation of energy efficiency measures as the first step towards reducing emissions through energy conservation.

In addition, the Finance Committee focused on the impact, repercussions, and potential opportunities, arising from the implementation of a carbon tax as prescribed by the federal government.

While the carbon tax would only be imposed if the province failed to produce a plan that helped achieve the federal government's climate change goals, the committee felt it needed to be armed with knowledge and information to develop

options for the province to successfully adapt to any enforced tax.

The carbon tax wasn't the only public policy challenge the chamber tackled in 2016. In response to provincial Finance Minister Kevin Doherty's call for "transformative" change in how the government does business, serves the public and earns revenues, the chamber and five other business groups established TransformSK.

Co-chaired by CEO McLellan and Saskatchewan Construction Association president Mark Cooper, TransformSK held 60 sessions in 14 communities and received hundreds of submissions. The resulting report contained 45 'Calls to Action' that could lead to transformative change in the way government operates. While 2015 and 2016 were both election years, 2017 also saw significant changes in

the political landscape in Saskatchewan, as both government and opposition parties changed leaders.

Premier Brad Wall surprised the province by announcing his intention to resign as Saskatchewan Party leader and "retire from politics" after 10 years as Premier in August 2017. Rosthern-Shellbrook MLA Scott Moe won the leadership contest in January 2018 and was sworn in as Premier on February 2, 2018.

The NDP was also in the process of choosing a leader to replace Cam Broten, who resigned after losing his seat in the 2016 election. In March 2018, the NDP chose Saskatoon doctor and three-time leadership candidate Ryan Meili as leader.

In his CEO's message in the 2017 annual report, McLellan alluded to all the changes taking place at the provincial and federal level.

"This last year was one for the history books," McLellan said. "We fought federal tax changes, experienced the change in leadership of both the government and opposition parties and kept up the pressure with regards to getting Saskatchewan businesses a fair deal on carbon emissions regulations. And that's just some of it!"

Regina lawyer and 2017 chair Patricia Warsaba agreed that the "summer of 2017 was a tumultuous time with the announcement by the federal government

of proposed tax changes." Warsaba was referring to proposals by federal Finance Minister Bill Morneau to change tax planning strategies of Canadian Controlled Private Corporations (CCPCs).

The chamber mounted a major lobbying campaign to show that "the business community strongly opposed the proposed tax changes," including circulating an online petition that collected responses from more than 600 businesses employing over 15,000 people.

"The changes would have negatively impacted tens of thousands of businesses," Warsaba said. "It was amazing to see the chamber network across Canada speak as one voice, a voice that ultimately the federal government could not ignore."

Warsaba also had accolades for Saskatchewan's departing Premier, noting that Wall "accomplished much during his tenure, but one of the most important achievements was the change in attitude he was able to instill in all of us. People are now positive about Saskatchewan and its role in the country and the world."

On the climate change front, the chamber released its Energy Efficiency Strategy in November 2017. The two main objectives of the recommendations were to reduce carbon emissions, and also increase Saskatchewan industrial competitiveness. The chamber also backed the provincial government's Prairie Resilience climate

change strategy, released in December 2017, which would employ "offsets, performance credits and emissions-intensity targets" aimed at large emitters, without resorting to a carbon tax.

**The chamber also achieved another big win with the announcement in March 2018 by Education Minister Gordon Wyant that financial literacy will be introduced into the province's K-12 curriculum during the 2018-19 school year. The announcement capped decades of lobbying efforts and collaboration with educators to develop a financial literacy program for elementary and secondary school students.**

Finally, the chamber saw some more positive results from its Northern Business Task Force report from 2014, which proposed 12 recommendations to accelerate northern economic and social development.

Based on three fact-finding visits to the north over three years, the task force report focused on increased energy efficiency; improved infrastructure, including all-weather roads; increased food subsidies, and high-speed internet for northern communities.

In 2017, the federal government announced support in principle for the Wollaston Lake road, significantly increased food subsidies under the Nutrition North Canada program, and financial support for high-speed internet. SaskTel also chipped in with



**A Blueprint for Saskatchewan Business Competitiveness report and media conference.**



improved high-speed internet service to 26 northern communities.

The challenges facing Saskatchewan's business community seemed to be mounting at an ever-increasing rate.

In 2018 and 2019, carbon pricing and federal climate change policy, a sluggish economy and rising competition from the 'gig' economy, meant that business owners faced a multitude of challenges.

But, as chamber CEO McLellan remarked in the SCC's 2018-19 annual report, challenges can also give rise to opportunities. "There have always been challenges in Saskatchewan, but there have always been more opportunities and as your provincial chamber, we will work with you to make sure we tackle those challenges together."

For example, SCC and Canadian Chamber of Commerce officials attended a "Day on the Hill" advocacy effort in Ottawa in May 2018, in support of the Trans Mountain Pipeline project. This "day of support" included meetings with Finance Minister Bill Morneau, Minister of Natural Resources Jim Carr, Leader of the Opposition Andrew Scheer, the Independent Senators Group and the Steel Caucus.

In April 2018, the SCC provided comments to the House Committee on the Environment regarding Bill C-69, which aimed to overhaul the country's regulatory process for major projects, and made a

number of recommendations to remedy the bill's many shortcomings. In January 2019, the SCC also provided additional comment to Senate hearings on Bill C-69.

While firmly opposed to the imposition of the federal carbon pricing, the chamber worked with industry stakeholders to promote the development of more renewable energy sources and energy efficiency to reduce the province's carbon footprint.

The resulting internal report, *The Renewable Energy Sector in Saskatchewan*, provided an overview of the renewable energy sector and identified barriers and business opportunities in the sector. The report will help guide to the chamber's advocacy efforts and public policy recommendations as the province transitions to a low-carbon economy.

Indigenous engagement is another chamber initiative that seeks to take the challenges facing Indigenous people in Saskatchewan and turn them into opportunities. The Indigenous Engagement Charter is designed to serve as a roadmap to provide businesses with tools to achieve engagement with Indigenous employees and partners and assist the business community in working towards reconciliation.

With the rise in the gig economy, specifically ride sharing companies, the chamber responded by developing a regulatory

framework that would provide a level playing field for all market participants, while giving consumers greater choice.

The SCC made a number of recommendations, including regulating safety standards, while phasing out barriers to entry and price controls, several of which were included in the government's *Vehicles-for-Hire Act*.

The icing on the cake for the chamber came in 2018 after it was nominated as a finalist for the Chamber of the Year Award by the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (ACCE) for the third year in a row. The award is presented to a state or provincial chamber in North America that achieves advocacy excellence for its members, and the Saskatchewan Chamber finished second only to the Hawaii Chamber of Commerce in the state/province category.

"This is a great achievement for us and we are proud to represent Saskatchewan and Canada," said SCC CEO McLellan.

In September 2019, the chamber released another study, *Beyond 2020: A Blueprint for Saskatchewan Competitiveness*, which included 24 recommendations in six key areas to assist government in improving the province's competitiveness.

The recommendations include ensuring that Saskatchewan goods get to market, increasing trade and market diversification,

removing interprovincial trade barriers and providing more skills training and STEM-based learning in the K-12 curriculum.

Perhaps the ultimate compliment paid to *Beyond 2020* was that some of its recommendations were adopted in the province's own growth plan in November, *Saskatchewan's Growth Plan: the Next Decade of Growth 2020-2030*. The growth plan establishes 30 goals, such as reaching 1.4 million in population, creating 100,000 new jobs, increasing exports by 50 per cent and value-added agriculture sales to \$10 billion by 2030.







## CHAPTER SIX

# 2020 & Beyond: Looking Back, Moving Forward

The chamber's vision of making Saskatchewan the best place to live, work, and invest continues to be its driving force and will ensure it is relevant for another century, and beyond.





What does the past 100 years tell us about the future of the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce?

The first president of the chamber, Maj. F.J. James, had some sage advice for future chamber members when he spoke at the first annual meeting of the Saskatchewan Associated Boards of Trade (the chamber's predecessor organization) on March 8, 1921, in Saskatoon.

"As a business organization, we must maintain a level head, and when we make statements we must be prepared to back them up with irrefutable evidence... We must tread carefully, and by so doing, our demands, when made upon governments and corporations, will be treated with respect and granted careful consideration."

While not an official statement of principles, James's words provided some practical advice to chamber members as they worked to change and shape government policy over the years.

When faced with a government that seemed indifferent, if not hostile, to business, the chamber found ways to work with the CCF to achieve a peaceful and

productive co-existence. Infrastructure projects, like rural electrification, highway construction and the South Saskatchewan River Dam, were ones the Douglas government and the chamber could work on together, despite their differences.

Thanks to the chamber's tireless advocacy work, major reforms to corporation and personal income tax systems, as well as reductions in business and property taxes, were achieved during the nearly half-century of CCF-NDP governance in Saskatchewan.

Not surprisingly, the chamber had greater lobbying success under more business-friendly governments, like the Thatcher Liberals from 1964 to 1971, the Devine Progressive Conservatives from 1982 to 1991, or the Saskatchewan Party government from 2007 to the present.

But even these pro-business governments needed to be reined in sometimes, when deficits and debts got too large and business principles, like not spending more than you make, seemed to be forgotten in the rush to buy votes and win elections. The chamber was always there to remind them its support was not unconditional and had

to be earned. The chamber continued to push for fiscally responsible, if not politically popular, policies, such as sales tax harmonization and establishing a heritage fund for non-renewable resource revenues.

Arguably, the chamber was most effective when it remained an advocate for policies that transcended politics and business and aimed at improving the economy and society as a whole. As an early proponent for programs to help Indigenous people get an education and training, find a job and start a business, the chamber was acting not only in the interest of its members, but that of the larger community.

Today, the chamber continues to be a voice for moderation, compromise, reason and pragmatism in its policy-making role.

It will play the role of honest broker, constructive critic, trustworthy adviser and, yes, at times, shameless booster and cheerleader for the province of Saskatchewan, its economy and its people.

According to Valerie Sluth, the chamber's 2020 chair, that's exactly the direction the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce will be going in during the years ahead.





Sluth, founder and CEO of Praxis Consulting Ltd. of Regina, says the chamber needs to remain the province's "objective, trusted voice" that occupies the middle of the road, especially at a time of increasing political polarization.

That means taking positions that aren't always typically business positions, such as running the occasional deficit, rather than balancing the budget every year. "We need to be strategic, not political," Sluth added.

That means sometimes proposing politically unpopular ideas and opposing popular ones. For example, sales tax harmonization is an idea that the chamber has been advocating for years, not because it's popular, but because it's good fiscal policy.



In other words, unlike some business or taxpayer groups that always favour tax cuts and balanced budgets, less government spending and less government regulation, the chamber takes a more balanced approach.

The chamber is concerned with the well-being, not just of individual businesses or even the business community, but the entire province. Such an organization transcends politics and so-called pro-business policies.

Since the election of its first female chair 30 years ago, the chamber has also taken a leadership role in promoting women in the business world and the labour force generally. "I think the chamber is doing a very good job of recognizing the changing

face of the labour force," Sluth said. "We know that the workforce is going to have increasingly more women in leadership. Similarly, the chamber has promoted a greater role for Indigenous people in the economy and championed leaders, like Richard Ahenakew, who became the first Indigenous leader of a chamber of commerce in Canada in 2010.

In addition, the chamber is promoting the Indigenous Engagement Charter initiative, which requires participating business to commit to changing attitudes and perceptions in their workplace over a three-year period, with the view to making their workplaces more accepting and welcoming of Indigenous employees and businesses.

Attracting, retaining and integrating new Canadians into the workforce is another challenge the chamber has embraced.

Finally, the province, which has relied on resource extraction and commodity production to prosper in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, needs to adapt to the demands and realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy.

The chamber sees an economic revolution happening globally and believes that Saskatchewan can be a global leader in the economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century by thinking creatively.

Some of that creative thinking can be found in the chamber's 2019 report, *Beyond 2020: A Blueprint for Saskatchewan Business Competitiveness*.

After thoroughly analyzing the province's competitiveness issues, the chamber issued a report chock full of recommendations, including a major review of the tax system, reform of sales taxes and resource royalties, regulatory streamlining, increased support for R&D and workforce training and development, among others.

In other words, the chamber did what it always does. It took a 'big picture' look at an issue, consulted its members, did its homework, crunched the numbers and came up with real-world, workable solutions.

Unlike some business or taxpayer groups that fire off a press release at the drop of a hat, the chamber takes the time to study issues thoroughly, talk to its members, then formulate policy. It's not always the quickest off the mark, but it responds in an informed, reasoned and pragmatic way. Just the way Maj. F.J. James, the first president of the chamber, would have done. And, One hundred years after its formation, James would have been proud of the successes the chamber has achieved. No doubt, he will be just as proud of what the chamber will do over the next hundred years.







ABEX AWARDS

# ABEX Business of the Year

To honour the efforts of successful Saskatchewan businesses, large and small, the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce created the ABEX awards competition in 1984 as an annual tribute to Achievements in Business Excellence.





1984: Develcon

1985: North Canada Air Ltd.  
(Norcanair)

1986: Intercontinental Packers

1987: Humboldt Flour Mills

1988: Weyerhaeuser Canada  
Ltd., Saskatchewan Division

1989: Doepker Industries Ltd.

1990: N. Yanke Transfer Ltd.

1991: Great Western Brewing  
Company Ltd.

1992: Spar Group Ltd.



1993: Brandt Industries Ltd.

1994: Thomson Meats Ltd.

1995: Cameco Corporation

1996: Software 2000 Inc.

1997: WaveCom Electronics Inc.

1998: Cover-All Business Systems

1999: Superior Millwork Ltd.

2000: Weyerhaeuser Saskatchewan  
Ltd.

2001: Doepker Industries Ltd.

2002: Nexans Canada Inc.



2003: Bioriginal Food & Science  
Corporation

2004: Saskcan Pulse Trading Inc.

2005: VCom Inc.

2006: Eagle Drilling Service

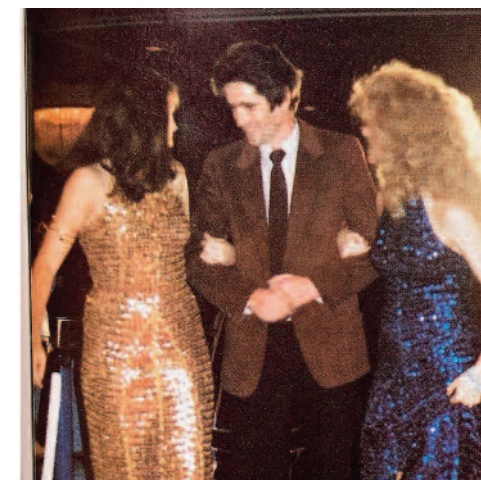
2007: Partners In Motion

2008: The Mosaic Company

2009: North Ridge Development  
Corporation

2010: Jay's Moving and  
Storage Ltd.

2011: Magna Electric



2012: Alliance Grain Traders

2013: Diamonds of Detroit AND  
Alliance Energy

2014: Yorkton Plumbing & Heating

2015: Minard's Leisure World

2016: Hillberg & Berk

2017: CAA Saskatchewan

2018: Industrial Machine and  
Manufacturing Inc.

2019: JNE Welding Ltd.



## ABEX AWARDS





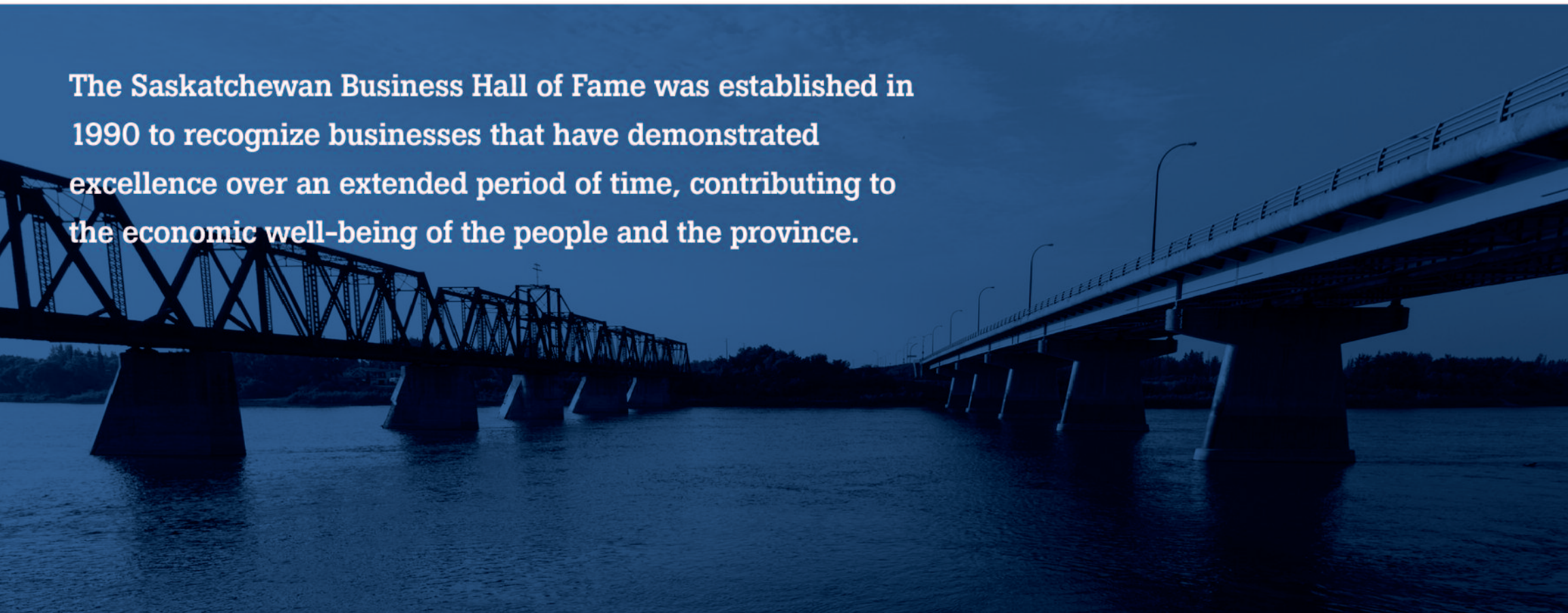




SASK BUSINESS  
HALL OF FAME

# Saskatchewan Business Hall of Fame

The Saskatchewan Business Hall of Fame was established in 1990 to recognize businesses that have demonstrated excellence over an extended period of time, contributing to the economic well-being of the people and the province.





1990: Saskatchewan Wheat Pool

1998: Kramer Ltd.

2008: Doepker Industries Ltd.

2018: Meridian Surveys Inc.

1990: McCallum-Hill Limited

1999: Early's Farm & Garden Centre Ltd.

2009: Rawlco Radio

2019: O & T Farms Ltd.

1990: Flexi-Coil Ltd.

2000: El-Rancho Food Services Ltd.

2010: Miners Construction Co. Ltd.

1991: Federated Co-operatives Limited

2001: Bourgault Industries Ltd.

2011: Weyburn Inland Terminal Ltd.

1992: Athabaska Airways Ltd.

2002: IMC Canada

2012: PotashCorp

1993: Intercontinental Packers Limited

2003: Cameco Corporation

2013: Anderson Pump House Ltd.

1994: Morris Industries Inc.

2004: PIC Investment Group Inc.

2014: M. D. Ambulance Care Ltd.

1995: The Concorde Group of Companies

2005: Brandt Group of Companies

2015: Graham

1996: IPSCO Inc.

2006: PCL Construction Management Inc.

2016: Prairie Mud Service

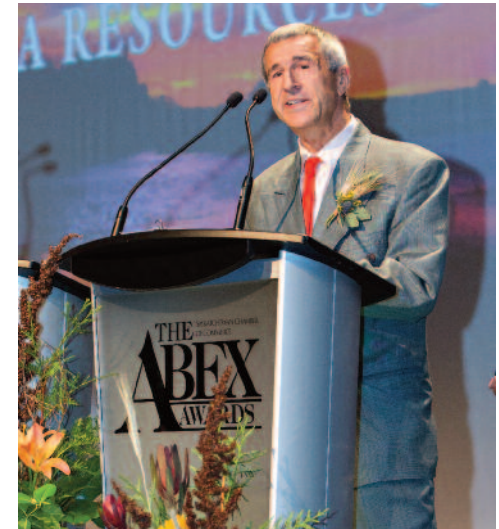
1997: Nelson Lumber Company Ltd.

2007: Yanke Group of Companies

2017: AREVA Resources Canada



## SASK BUSINESS HALL OF FAME





















## CREDITS

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Contact information [www.saskchamber.com](http://www.saskchamber.com)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bruce Johnstone is a Regina native and graduate of Sheldon-William Collegiate, who received his Bachelor of Arts (Honours) degree in English from the University of Saskatchewan in 1975. After working briefly with the provincial government as an information officer, he joined the Leader-Post in 1977 as the L-P's bureau reporter in Estevan. He moved to Regina in 1979 and worked as a general assignment reporter, labour reporter and feature writer before joining the business department in 1983. He took over as financial editor in 1985. For the next 30 years, Johnstone oversaw business coverage for the Leader-Post.

During that time, he won awards for his writing from the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (CIM), Canadian Association of Financial Planners and the Saskatchewan Reporters' Association. He also received the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce Lifetime Achievement Award in 2017. On Dec. 2, 2016, Johnstone retired from the Leader-Post one month short of his 40th anniversary with the newspaper. In 2017, he formed a consulting firm, Bruce Johnstone Communications, which offers freelance journalism, writing, editing and photography services.





