



Just the Facts: The Changing Face of Sask.

At SEIU-West, we believe in having an engaged membership. In anticipation of the Saskatchewan election on April 4, 2016 we have identified several key issues that matter to you, your families and communities. "Just the Facts" sheets on those issues are part of the information, education and tools we offer to help you make informed choices about voting and getting involved in the election.

Has the government responded with open hearts and open minds to the change in Sask.'s cultural mix?

Saskatchewan's cultural mix is changing.

- Over the past decade, the face of Sask. has changed. The province's population has not just grown larger, it has become much more diverse.
- The Wall government has aggressively promoted economic and population growth as the solution to almost all problems. However, for Sask. to be a truly just and prosperous society we must ensure that:
 - We are truly welcoming to newcomers.
 - We are welcoming to people and groups who have always been a part of our communities, but who have historically been ignored, marginalized, or discriminated against.
 - We develop and strengthen the public institutions that will enable people from all communities to live together, care for each other and enjoy the opportunity to thrive.

Rising immigration, especially from Asia—but key supports for immigrants and refugees have been cut.

- The number of international immigrants to Sask. has been rising steadily since 2003, four years before the Sask Party was first elected. The number has grown from about 2,100 immigrants in 2005 to nearly 12,000 in 2014. Most of this growth has been in immigration from Asia, especially from the Philippines.
- In 2005 40% of new immigrants to Sask. came from Asia, more than from any other continent. The top country was China, which contributed 12% of new immigrants. By 2014 (the latest year for which complete data is available), 72% of new immigrants to Sask. came from Asia—the highest percentage of any province, including British Columbia. The top countries of origin were the Philippines (more than 25% of Sask.'s new immigrants) and India (more than 20%).
- According to international human rights law, a refugee is someone who has fled their home country because they have a legitimate fear of being persecuted. Over the past decade Sask. has taken in 500-600 refugees each year. The top source countries have changed, depending on the global situation: Afghanistan in the early 2000s, Myanmar (Burma) in the mid-2000s, and from 2009-12 Iraq. Sask. welcomed 231 Iraqi refugees in 2009 alone.
- As part of Canada's response to the Syrian refugee crisis, the federal government has committed to accepting as many as 50,000 Syrian refugees into Canada by the end of 2016. Sask. is expected to take in at most 850. However, the Wall government has been critical and less than supportive of the federal plans.



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- Murray Mandryk, columnist on Sask. politics for the Leader-Post and Star-Phoenix, was critical of the Sask. government's response to the federal government's Syrian refugee plans. He accused Premier Wall of feeding fears that there are large numbers of ISIS terrorists among them. He also criticized Sask. Immigration Minister Jeremy Harrison's claims that the province might have difficulty taking in its share of the refugees. In Mandryk's words, "finding ways to accommodate newcomers is what this province has always been about." The government should be encouraging "creative solutions", instead of thinking of a bunch of reasons to delay or avoid taking its fair share of Syrian refugees.
- Since 2011 the government has decreased the amount of money budgeted for what is described in the government's budget as "programs and services related to the settlement and integration of immigrants and refugees into the social and economic life of Saskatchewan".
- Over the past decade about 70% of immigrants to Sask. have settled in Saskatoon or Regina. However, since 2011 the provincial government has decreased its grants to the Saskatoon and Regina Open Doors Societies, two the province's oldest and largest non-profit community-based organizations focused on immigrant and refugee assistance, by nearly 10%.

Aboriginal peoples: rising population, persistent gaps, and a need for reconciliation.

- Aboriginal peoples (a.k.a. indigenous peoples) have always been here, but only recently has non-Aboriginal society begun to take notice, and engage meaningfully with them and with our shared, troubled, unequal history.
- Aboriginal people--First Nations, Metis, and a very small number of Inuit—make up 16% of Sask.'s population (second only to Manitoba at 17%). Half of the Sask. Aboriginal population is under 20. Statistics Canada estimates that by 2036, Aboriginals will make up between 19 and 23% of the total Sask. population, and 1/4 to 1/3 of its under-15 population.
- By many key measures of well-being, Aboriginal people in Sask. are worse off than the general population:
 - Health including mental health (e.g. high rates of diabetes, suicide)
 - Educational outcomes (such as high school graduation rates)
 - Employment and income. For example, according to census data 2/3 of First Nations children live in poverty.
 - Involvement with the criminal justice system as accused, victim, inmate
 - Involvement with the child welfare system
- These gaps are not a coincidence, not an accident, and cannot be attributed to bad individual lifestyle choices.
- In 2015 the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was released. A key quote:
 - "The closing of residential schools [which did not occur until 1995] did not bring their story to an end. The legacy of the schools continues to this day. It is reflected in the significant educational, income, and health disparities between Aboriginal people and other Canadians—disparities that condemn many Aboriginal people to shorter, poorer, and more troubled lives. The legacy is also reflected in the intense racism some people harbour against Aboriginal people and the systemic and other forms of discrimination Aboriginal people regularly experience in Canada."
- According to the TRC, the solution to these gaps is a process of reconciliation, which "will require more than pious words about the shortcomings of those who preceded us." In other words, all of us, even recent newcomers, have a role to play in this process.



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- Most of the TRC's "calls to action" (recommendations) target the federal government, because the feds historically controlled most Aboriginal policy. However, a number of them specifically call on provincial governments to act, including:
 - Reduce the number of Aboriginal children in care "The child welfare system is the residential school system of our day." Sask.'s Advocate for Children and Youth has made similar points for years e.g. about the negative long-term social and economic consequences of the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system.
 - Better protect Aboriginal languages and cultures, e.g. by establishing culturally appropriate early childhood education programs.
 - Implement a comprehensive Aboriginal health care strategy, including improved recruitment and retention of Aboriginal health professionals (especially in the north), and greater recognition of the value of traditional healing practices.
 - Increase funding for alternative Aboriginal justice systems/processes, including community sanctions as alternative to custody.
- Sask. has one of the largest and fastest-growing populations of Aboriginal inmates in Canada. 64% of inmates of the federal prison in Prince Albert are Aboriginal. The figure is 80% in Sask. provincial jails (for persons serving sentences of less than 2 years or who are in custody awaiting trial).
- Analysis of Sask. court records shows that compared to non-Aboriginal accused/offenders:
 - Aboriginal accused are less likely to have their charges dropped.
 - Aboriginal offenders get harsher sentences for the same crime (more likely to get a custodial sentence, more likely to get a longer sentence, less likely to get parole).
- In a 1999 decision called Gladue the Supreme Court of Canada called the overrepresentation of Aboriginal peoples in Canada's prisons "a crisis in the Canadian criminal justice system," and ordered that all courts, when sentencing an Aboriginal offender, must take into account the "unique systemic or background factors which may have played a part in bringing the particular Aboriginal offender before the courts; and the types of sentencing procedures and sanctions, which may be appropriate in the circumstances for the offender because of his or her particular Aboriginal heritage or connection." However, there is evidence that, compared to courts in other provinces, Sask. courts have not been consistently complying with Gladue.
- In 2011 the Sask. Ombudsman noted that the province's provincial jails contained twice as many inmates as the jails were designed to hold. Gyms, classrooms, and workshops—key to the successful rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders—have been converted to dormitories, and double-bunking has become the norm.
- The Sask. government recently privatized food services in our provincial jails. When inmates staged a hunger strike in November 2015 to protest the poor quality of the food, Premier Wall remarked, "If you really don't like the prison food, there's one way to avoid it, and that's don't go to prison." Seen in the light of Aboriginal overrepresentation and the root causes of that overrepresentation, such statements and the kinds of attitudes they encourage are not consistent with the TRC's spirit of reconciliation.
- When the TRC's final report was released, the government of Manitoba—whose Aboriginal population is very similar to Sask.'s—immediately announced an additional \$1.4M of new funding specifically targeting the report's recommendations about improving educational outcomes. Premier Wall's response was that he would "create a multi-ministry team to carefully examine this report".
- The recent shootings in La Loche have been described by some as a tragedy that was waiting to happen. For years the media and local politicians have been sounding the alarm about the community's poor social conditions, lack of opportunities, and lack of public



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services such as mental health and addictions treatment. In the aftermath of the shootings Premier Wall proposed bringing in counselors from North Carolina, as if the legacy of colonialism and residential schools had nothing to do with the events. Political columnist Murray Mandryk called Wall's response "a disservice to the community and an embarrassment. We need to stop ignoring La Loche and spend the money on the social supports it needs."

What Can I Do??

Get involved!

- Share this information with family, friends and coworkers, and use it to start conversations about the issues.
- Ask questions of the candidates and other political party representatives who contact you about the issues raised in this "Just the Facts" sheet.
- Become involved with the party or candidate whose positions on these issues best serve the needs of you and your community.
- Write a letter to the editor to your local paper to share information on issues affecting your community.
- Use social media to share facts about issues that matter during the election.
- For more information about becoming more actively involved, visit www.purplevotes.ca.

Selected Sources

- Demers J. Warehousing Prisoners in Saskatchewan: A Public Health Approach. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Saskatchewan Office. September 2014. https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Saskatchewan%20Office/2014/10/warehousing_prisoners_in_saskatchewan.pdf
- Government of Saskatchewan. Ministry of the Economy. Saskatchewan Statistical Immigration Report 2011 to 2013. <http://www.economy.gov.sk.ca/immigration/sk-immigration-statistical-report-2013>
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. TRC Findings: TRC final report. 2015. <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=890>

For further information about this topic, including details about the sources of the information on this fact sheet, please contact Karman Kawchuk, Research Officer, SEIU-West, at karman.kawchuk@seiuwest.ca