

## Employment figures grow again

Saskatchewan continues to offer a glimmer of good news against a steady flow of economic doom and gloom as evidenced by the latest employment figures.

Saskatchewan's June unemployment rate was 4.6 per cent, best in Canada. Similarly, in June more people were working in this province than ever before.

In the Prince Albert area, the number of employed people snuck past a key milestone, growing by 2,100 in the last 12 months to 100,300, according to Rob Norris, minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour.

"These are the third-highest employment gains in the province."

A number of federal and provincial initiatives have helped boost employment figures in the North, with a specific accent on First Nations people, Norris said.

"This will now be 11 months running, provincewide, that we're seeing an increase in First Nation and Métis employment," he said. "We know how vitally important that is. It reflects that our workplaces in Saskatchewan are becoming more inclusive."

To continue creating jobs, the province must keep on the same path by making the most of \$2.5 billion in provincial infrastructure spending, providing skills training for local residents and encouraging people outside the province to settle in Saskatchewan, he said.

"As newcomers arrive in Saskatchewan, they are helping to foster and grow economic growth in ways that hadn't been expected," Norris said.

Prince Albert and District Chamber of Commerce president Krista Eggum delighted in the latest figures.

"Once again, Saskatchewan is the aberration," she said.

She predicted that the province will avoid much of the turmoil gripping the rest of the continent.

"I think all the indicators we've seen are that we're going to continue to weather the storm, and that, to date, we've had the good fortune to come out ahead."

Both Norris and Eggum say the key to continued growth of the region's economy lies in efforts to diversify, and lessen reliance on typical staples such as forestry and farming.

"It is the economic diversification, throughout various regions of the province that allows us to continue to lead Canada in economic growth," said Norris.

Eggum said the closure of the pulp mill some three years ago remains a powerful reminder of the dangers of failing to diversify.

"We get so centred on what we've got that we don't see the need for change, and the need for growth. I think that's where Saskatchewan was, for a couple of years."

Future growth, she said, relies on such things as " the potential of the Iogen project, and the green park," as well as nuclear power.

"The opportunities are great, in that sector, if we can make it happen."

Source: VERN FAULKNER  
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