



Saskatchewan Liberal Association Online

[Home](#)

[Our Leader](#)

[Platform](#)

[Candidates](#)

[Current MLAs](#)

[Mission Statement](#)

[Ethics](#)

[Links](#)

Liberal Election Platform

[Education](#) [Health](#) [Highways](#) [Agriculture](#) [Taxes](#) [Jobs](#)

Putting Saskatchewan People First ... The Clear Choice

Saskatchewan farmers are facing the worst agriculture crisis since the depression ... without a safety net.

In 1991, the NDP promised to negotiate a long-term farm income stabilization program, to protect farmers in just the kind of circumstances they are facing today. Farm commodity prices have been slashed, many farmers face cashflow problems at harvest time and provincial funds are still sitting in the provincial NDP government coffers, and thousands of farm families are worried that they are facing foreclosure.

The simple fact is, if farmers were getting paid what their crops are worth, rather than a price controlled by European subsidies, there wouldn't be a farm crisis.

The Romanow NDP could not have picked a worse time to call an election. We should not be in an election at harvest time ... we should all be standing up to Ottawa to keep our farm families on the land.

The NDP bureaucrats in Regina, and the Ottawa bureaucrats gutted GRIP, the farmers income stabilization safety net, taking \$500 million from the fund. There isn't a nice way to say it, they stole the farmers' safety net ... and for eight years the Romanow

NDP has done nothing to replace it.

Saskatchewan farm families need immediate relief ... and that must be made a top priority of the Premier of Saskatchewan and the Prime Minister of Canada ... today.

And Saskatchewan farmers need long-term income stabilization ... and that too must be a top priority of the Premier of Saskatchewan and the Prime Minister of Canada ... before seeding next spring.

Under a Melenchuk Liberal government, these will be top priorities of the Government of Saskatchewan and the Premier ... and this will only happen under a government that will stand up to Ottawa to make sure Saskatchewan gets its fair share from Ottawa.

At the same time, Saskatchewan must make choices, today, that will determine the opportunities that will be available to our children as we enter the new century.

We must support our post-secondary students ... we must work in partnership with the private sector to create a climate in which business can start up and expand in Saskatchewan, to create the good jobs Saskatchewan people need ... and we must leave more of taxpayers money in their pockets, because they know better how to spend it than does government.

There is a role for government, and there is a role for the private sector ... and we should know the difference.

The private sector can invest in power plants in Guyana, or cable companies in the United States ... if these investments make sense to them. Governments should not risk taxpayers dollars on these kinds of risky ventures.

The government should, and must ensure that people in every corner of Saskatchewan have access to the health services they need, that people have safe highways to travel on, and that the next generation receives the high quality education they will need to face the challenges of the next century. We don't need more government interference ... we need to make the right choices ... and do a better job of living up to the responsibilities of government.

This site outlines the Election 1999 Platform of the Melenchuk Liberals. Please explore it, challenge it, and compare it to the platforms of the Romanow NDP and the Saskatchewan conservative Party. When you have done so, I think you will

agree ... the choice is clear.

Choose carefully ... and make sure to vote on September 16 ... so, together, we can build a future of pride, dignity, hope and opportunity for all people in Saskatchewan.



Jim Melenchuk

Education Health Highways Agriculture Taxes Jobs

Send mail to mbelt@cableregina.com with questions or comments about this web site.

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EDUCATION

The Government of Saskatchewan spends more money on paying the interest on the provincial debt, each year, (\$724 million) than it provides to local school boards for elementary and high school education (\$450 million).

Interest payments are also higher than the total annual provincial government funding to our universities, technical institutes and skill training programs for Saskatchewan young people (\$467 million).

We can't turn around 15 years of neglect of our education programs overnight, but we can start by making better choices today ... and making commitments to the future of our children and young people ... commitments the Jim Melenchuk Liberals will implement in the next four years.

Immediate Priorities

By cutting advertising budgets of government departments and Crown corporations, getting rid of the Cabinet Ministers' executive airplane, and cutting the political staff of Roy Romanow's Executive Council, we can save enough money to help students facing tough times getting enough money together to start the training they need to build a rewarding future.

- ♦ **starting next semester, in January 2000, a Melenchuk Liberal government will provide \$1,000 scholarships to all first and second year Saskatchewan students enrolled full-time at our two university campuses or any of our SIAST campuses**

By making better choices, by cutting additional unnecessary government expenditures, such as the excessive numbers of civil service and Crown corporation middle managers making in excess of \$60,000 a year, and cutting out unnecessary out-of-country travel we will save enough to start to return funding to our local school boards to an acceptable level ... relieving the education tax burden on homeowners, farmers and small businesses.

- ♦ **starting with the 2000/2001 provincial budget, a Melenchuk Liberal government will increase education funding to local school boards, to cover 45 percent of the costs of elementary and secondary education**

Our Four-year Commitment

This year Saskatchewan is facing a farm crisis which is unmatched since the dirty 30's ... and the economic turnaround will take time ... but it will come. As the economy improves, a Melenchuk Liberal

government will expand funding to post-secondary students, and to local school boards to remove a larger share of the costs of elementary and high school education from the property tax base.

Our goal, in the long-term is to increase provincial funding to local school boards to cover 60 percent of the costs of elementary and high school education ... as quickly as possible. This will cut about \$200 per year from the property tax bill of a taxpayer with a \$2,200 annual property tax.

- ♦ **by our fourth year in government, a Melenchuk Liberal government will increase grants to local school boards to cover 50 percent of the costs of elementary and high school education ... up from the 42 percent the Romanow NDP is providing today**

Saskatchewan young people are our most important resource. They deserve the opportunity to get the post-secondary education they will need to compete in today's changing economy.

Today, thousands of students ... and their parents ... face huge debt loads because the Romanow NDP has done nothing to keep the costs of higher education down.

- ♦ **starting in September 2000, a Melenchuk Liberal government will expand our \$1,000 per year post-secondary student scholarship program, to include all Saskatchewan students attending a Saskatchewan post-secondary institution full-time ... for a maximum of five years per student**

HEALTH

The Government of Saskatchewan now spends \$1.9 billion dollars a year on health care, but still can't get its priorities right. The Romanow NDP has cut back on the numbers of front-line health care staff, made working conditions intolerable for nurses and many other health care professionals, and created the longest health care waiting lists in Canada. At the same time, the NDP puts millions into health district boards and administrative staff.

The Romanow NDP chose more administrators and longer waiting lists; the Melenchuk Liberals will choose more front-line staff and better regional services ... all within the existing health budget.

It's your choice ... on September 16 make it count.

Immediate Priorities

By eliminating the 32 unnecessary health district bureaucracies, front-line staff can be increased, regional services can meet peoples health care needs close to home, and waiting lists can be eliminated ... all at the same cost as is now budgeted.

- ♦ **a Melenchuk Liberal government will establish 10 to 12 regional hospitals, at existing hospitals**
- ♦ **each regional hospital will provide renal dialysis, physical and occupational therapy and a full range of diagnostic services ... using in-hospital x-ray equipment and one of four new mobile magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machines**
- ♦ **300 new full-time nursing positions will be created to improve the quality of care available at hospitals across Saskatchewan**

Our Four-year Commitment

The federal government has already made a commitment to increase the annual grants it provides to the Government of Saskatchewan for health care. A Melenchuk Liberal government will put every penny of these increases into health care ... to maintain and improve the quality of health care available to people in every corner of Saskatchewan.

- ♦ **throughout our four-year term of government, all of the increase in federal funding for health care will go to health care ... under a Melenchuk Liberal government there will be no skimming for other priorities**

As the economy improves, a Melenchuk Liberal government will expand funding to home care ... and to health research and education, to attract the top professionals we need, and to overcome the NDP education

cutbacks that are contributing to staff shortages in many health professions.

- ♦ **during our four-year term, a Melenchuk Liberal government will expand the number of health professionals graduating from Saskatchewan post-secondary education programs ... to meet Saskatchewan needs**
- ♦ **by our fourth year, a Melenchuk Liberal government will double health care research funding, in fields such as farm safety, geriatric care, and treatment of diseases such as cancer and multiple sclerosis**

HIGHWAYS, STREETS AND ROADS

In the 1999/2000 NDP budget, it is estimated that fuel taxes will bring in \$370 million ... but the NDP is planning on spending only \$235 million on highways and transportation.

Nine years of Saskatchewan conservative Party skimming from the fuel tax, and eight years of continued skimming by the NDP has made Saskatchewan the pothole capital of North America. And cutbacks in provincial funding to local governments has increased local property taxes ... while local streets and roads have become more dangerous.

Immediate Priorities

The skimming of fuel tax funds which should be used to build, maintain and repair our streets, roads and highways will end with the election of a Melenchuk Liberal government.

- ♦ **a Melenchuk Liberal government will put every penny collected in fuel taxes into our highways, streets and roads**
- ♦ **75 percent of fuel tax revenues (\$277.5 million) will be used to restore and maintain our provincial highways**
- ♦ **15 percent of fuel tax revenues (55.5 million) will be put into a Rural and Urban Streets and Roads Fund which will be transferred to local governments to help restore and maintain local streets and roads**
- ♦ **10 percent of fuel tax revenues (\$37 million), matched by the federal government, will be allocated to the Inter-Provincial Highways Twinning Program to twin the Trans-Canada and Yellowhead highways**

Our Four-year Commitment

Fifteen years of neglect by the Saskatchewan conservative Party and the NDP have caused many of our highways to deteriorate to the point that they will require a major rebuild. To make sure funds are available to get the job done, fuel taxes will be maintained at 1999 rates for four years.

- ♦ **for the next four years a Melenchuk Liberal government will freeze the provincial fuel tax, and commit every penny collected from the fuel tax to restoring and maintaining our highways streets and roads ... until Saskatchewan again has a safe and efficient road system**
- ♦ **once our highways have been brought up to standard, fuel taxes will be cut to a level which is just high enough to maintain our highways, streets and roads ... and not a penny more**

As the economy turns around and other provincial government revenues increase, small business tax rates will be lowered and property tax rebates will be increased.

The Rural and Urban Streets and Roads Fund will provide \$55.5 million per year to local governments to help them restore their streets and roads. Once local governments have covered these catch-up costs, grants from the fund can be used for normal maintenance and repair ... cutting the street maintenance and repair costs that are now included in local property taxes ... and relieving the pressure on local property taxes.

AGRICULTURE

As goes farming, so goes Saskatchewan.

Over the years, the Saskatchewan economy has diversified into other basic commodity sectors such as oil, potash, timber and uranium ... but the old saying is still true. Agriculture accounts for about one-sixth of the economic output of Saskatchewan ... accounting for about \$6 billion dollars in commodity sales in good years.

Between 1997 and 1998 Saskatchewan family farms were still among the most efficient and productive in the world ... but the international subsidy war slashed the value of our farm commodities by about \$400 million dollars per year.

This crop year they could fall by as much as another \$600 million. That's a drop of about \$1 billion in annual farm commodity sales ... as a direct result of the international subsidy war.

After the Romanow NDP came to power in 1991, promising a long-term farm income stabilization program to protect Saskatchewan family farms from the ups and downs caused by international grain subsidies, they killed GRIP ... the farmers income stabilization program.

Not only did they kill it ... they skimmed about \$200 million in provincial contributions from the fund.

Today, Saskatchewan farmers are facing the lowest commodity prices and farm incomes since the 1930's ... without the income stabilization program the Romanow NDP promised more than eight years ago.

Because the Romanow NDP has failed to negotiate and implement the farm income stabilization program they promised, Saskatchewan is now facing a farm crisis.

And that crisis will affect us all ... especially the hundreds of thousands of people whose livelihood depends on the farm economy.

We need long-term solutions ... but we can't risk losing 20 thousand farm families to foreclosure in the next six months. Because the Romanow NDP hasn't stood up to Ottawa on behalf of Saskatchewan's family farms, stop-gap measures and immediate relief must be put in place while the new Government of Saskatchewan works with farmers to develop and implement long-term solutions.

Immediate Priorities

The Government of Saskatchewan doesn't have deep enough pockets to take on the grain subsidies of European treasuries ... nor do Saskatchewan farm families.

A Melenchuk Liberal government will stand up to Ottawa ... with Saskatchewan's farm families. We will take a delegation of Saskatchewan farm families to Ottawa to force Ottawa to provide immediate federal funding ... to level the playing field in the international grain subsidy war.

- ♦ **a Melenchuk Liberal government will place responsibility for dealing with the farm crisis where it belongs ... on the Premier and the Prime Minister ... politicians are elected to take responsibility for making the decisions, not to pass the buck to bureaucrats**
- ♦ **within two weeks of being elected, working with farmers, a Melenchuk Liberal government will develop a workable method to pay out the provincial funds that are already committed to dealing with the farm crisis ... and get payments in farmers pockets by October 15**

The Romanow NDP has wasted 10 months dithering ... watching their bureaucrats play games ... so help from Ottawa has not been there when it's needed. As a result, many farm families are facing foreclosure, watching their costs go up and their cashflow drop. The Government of Saskatchewan can, and must provide some immediate relief.

- ♦ **within two weeks of being elected, a Melenchuk Liberal government will pass legislation stopping farm foreclosures for a period of up to 24 months, until a long-term income stabilization program has been put in place**
- ♦ **within two weeks of being elected, a Melenchuk Liberal government will pass legislation to change government regulations and stop collecting the fuel tax on farm fuels, then rebating it ... hard-pressed farm families don't need their cashflow problems increased by a bureaucratic tax system**
- ♦ **within two weeks of being elected, a Melenchuk Liberal government will pass legislation stopping closure of rural elevators to help stop rising grain transportation costs**
- ♦ **a Melenchuk Liberal government will provide funding to assist community groups to conduct feasibility studies (75 percent of the costs, to a maximum of \$60,000) ... to**

determine if they want to take over and operate grain elevators the large grain companies are seeking to close

Our Four-year Commitment

The simple fact is: if farmers were getting paid what their crops are worth, rather than a price controlled by European subsidies, there wouldn't be a farm crisis.

The farm crisis is a direct result of the international grain subsidy war ... and it can only be resolved at the World Trade Organization negotiations.

- ♦ **a Melenchuk Liberal government will demand that the Canadian World Trade Organization negotiating team include Saskatchewan representation ... to stand up for the interests of Saskatchewan family farms**

The Romanow NDP and the Reform Party have done nothing to provide long-term income stabilization for Saskatchewan farms. A Melenchuk Liberal government will take a strong stand, and force Ottawa to help farmers create an income security program designed by farmers, and to eliminate barriers to farmer-owned businesses that process agriculture commodities in Saskatchewan.

- ♦ **a Melenchuk Liberal government will implement a farmer designed and managed income stabilization program ... so future governments can't wipe it out ... and skim the cash for other priorities**

The new farm income stabilization program will allow farmers to contribute up to 2 percent of their commodity sales to their income stabilization account ... with matching federal (60%) and provincial (40%) funding, on the same basis as today. The program will be voluntary, and managed by a board of directors elected by Saskatchewan farmers.

- ♦ **a Melenchuk Liberal government will negotiate income tax changes that will allow farmers to contribute up to 8 percent of gross sales to the fund, income tax free ... to allow farmers to average income over the long term**
- ♦ **individual farmers will decide when to draw down funds from their account, in poor years ... and can use it as a registered retirement savings account when they decide to retire**

TAXES

The wild spending of the Saskatchewan conservative Party, from 1982 to 1991, left the Government of Saskatchewan with one of the largest per capita debt loads in Canada.

Today, the people of Saskatchewan still carry \$7 billion dollars of that debt ... in what amounts to a long-term mortgage on our future.

This year, 53 cents of every dollar you pay in provincial income tax goes directly to interest charges on the debt ... that's before any money goes to pay down the \$7 billion mortgage the Saskatchewan conservative Party put on our children's future.

Interest payments on the Saskatchewan conservative Party debt are the second largest expenditure of the provincial government ... higher than all elementary and secondary education funding to local school boards ... higher than the cost of all provincial policing, justice, courts and correctional centers ... higher than all provincial funding to post-secondary education and skill training.

If Saskatchewan didn't have to pay the interest on the Saskatchewan conservative Party debt, we could cut personal income taxes by 53 percent ... today.

Until interest payments on the provincial debt are brought down to about \$400 million a year, it will be difficult to provide the major tax cuts Saskatchewan people need ... it will be difficult, but we can make a good start.

A Melenchuk Liberal government will responsibly achieve immediate tax relief, while paying down the debt ... to make larger long-term tax cuts financially possible ... and sustainable.

To start, provincial government spending will be capped at 1999/2000 budget levels, for four years ... with the only exceptions being that increases in federal funding for health care will be put directly toward increasing the provincial health budget ... and the Melenchuk Liberal post-secondary education and tax relief programs outlined in this document will be funded from new revenues.

A share of new northern resource revenues will remain in northern Saskatchewan for northern business and employment development ... reducing long-term welfare dependency costs.

Then, the remaining major share of all new revenues, such as increases in resource revenues, will be allocated equally to paying down the debt and providing direct tax relief to Saskatchewan families.

Immediate Priorities

In the first year of a Melenchuk Liberal government, it may be necessary to spend some of the new revenues to pay Saskatchewan's fair share of family farm income stabilization programs. If these funds are needed to meet this immediate crisis, they will be put in place in our 2000/2001 budget. The remainder of revenue increases will be spent on immediate tax relief.

- ♦ **cutting the property tax burden by increasing provincial funding to local school boards ... to cover 45 percent of the cost of elementary and secondary education**
- ♦ **providing a property tax rebate of one-half of the property taxes paid on residences ... to a maximum of \$200 for homeowners and \$100 for renters**

People who have supported this province all their lives should not be taxed one more time ... after death.

- ♦ **a Melenchuk Liberal government will immediately remove the 6 percent provincial sales tax on funerals**

Our Four-year Commitment

Out of every dollar you pay in provincial income taxes, 53 cents goes just to pay the interest on the provincial debt, run up by the Saskatchewan conservative Party.

As the long-term \$7 billion Saskatchewan conservative Party debt matures, a Melenchuk Liberal government will refinance the debt at today's lower interest rates - lowering the total cost of provincial government interest payments. These savings will be directly passed on to taxpayers ... through lower personal income tax rates.

For example, if \$5 billion is refinanced at 7 percent, instead of 11 percent, your total provincial personal income tax (including surtaxes) can be cut by 15 percent ... or 21 percent of provincial basic personal income tax.

Once refinancing and debt paydown, from revenue increases, have reduced interest on the public debt to \$400 million ... from \$724 million today ... your total provincial personal income taxes (including surtaxes) will have been reduced by about 24 percent ... or 35 percent of provincial basic personal income tax.

For every \$19 million reduction in interest payments on the Saskatchewan conservative Party provincial debt, your basic provincial personal income tax will be reduced by 2 percent.

- ♦ **each year, a Melenchuk Liberal government will reduce basic provincial personal income tax by 2 percent for each \$19 million that interest payments on the provincial debt fall below \$724 million ... your provincial personal income tax will continue to be lowered as quickly as interest costs on the debt drop**

If refinancing and debt paydown does not cut interest costs by 95 million per year, by the fourth year of a Melenchuk Liberal government, resource revenue increases and additional savings in government administration costs will be used to top up the cut in the basic provincial personal income tax to at least 10 percent.

- ♦ **by its fourth year, a Melenchuk Liberal government will cut the basic personal income tax you pay by at least 10 percent**

As provincial government resource revenues increase, debt paydown will speed up and interest payments on the provincial debt will decline more rapidly ... and as the debt is refinanced at today's lower rates, your provincial personal income tax will drop.

At the same time, the equal share of new revenues that will go to other forms of property tax relief will increase. These increases will be applied first to help lower local school taxes on property ... then to increase the property tax rebate.

- ♦ **by the fourth year, a Melenchuk Liberal government will increase provincial grants to local school boards to cover 50 percent of the costs of elementary and secondary education in Saskatchewan ... up from 42 percent today**

Until the recent downturn in provincial resource royalties, provincial resource revenues were around \$700 million per year. This year they are projected at about \$550 million.

As oil prices rebound, new uranium mines come on stream, and other resource revenues grow, education property tax relief will be increased ... reaching 50 percent of total elementary and secondary education funding when resource revenues reach approximately \$800 million.

JOBS

The Melenchuk Liberals believe that the private sector should be encouraged to locate their businesses in Saskatchewan ... with incentives tied directly to the number of new jobs created.

We will also actively promote new joint venture business development by partnerships between private sector companies and aboriginal people and communities ... such as the new forestry joint venture developments successfully negotiated by aboriginal people in several northern Saskatchewan communities.

The Melenchuk Liberals also support expanded development of training programs ... which are directly linked to jobs ... in partnership with the federal government and the private sector. The Multi-Party Training Agreement, which provides training for jobs in the northern Saskatchewan mining industry, should be used as a model for training in other sectors, such as forestry, and in other parts of Saskatchewan.

Immediate Priorities

If a business doesn't exist in Saskatchewan today, a three to five year provincial corporate tax holiday costs the provincial government nothing ... since there would be no corporate taxes paid if there was no business.

- ♦ **a Melenchuk Liberal government will provide provincial corporate income tax breaks to businesses which create jobs in Saskatchewan, with the size of the reduction and the number of years of the reduction based on the number of new jobs created**

By eliminating the health district administrative bureaucracies, and reallocating existing budgets, a Melenchuk Liberal government will expand regional health care services and create new front-line health care jobs in communities throughout Saskatchewan.

- ♦ **a Melenchuk Liberal government will immediately create 300 new full-time nursing positions and 132 new positions providing diagnostic, treatment and occupational and physical therapy services at 10 to 12 designated regional hospitals**

Restoring and maintaining our highways, streets and roads will take several years.

- ♦ **during the first year of the expanded provincial highways program, and the Inter-Provincial Highways Twinning**

Program, approximately 1,500 new jobs will be created in communities throughout Saskatchewan, during the road building season

- ♦ **during the first year of the Rural and Urban Streets and Roads Fund, local governments throughout Saskatchewan are expected to create approximately 100 new year-round jobs and 500 new jobs during the road construction season**

Our Four-year Commitment

Post-secondary education provides many of the skills Saskatchewan young people need to obtain the good jobs they need to build a future, here in Saskatchewan ... but some industries are becoming so technically specialized that they require training targeted to their business.

- ♦ **a Melenchuk Liberal government will work in partnership with the private sector and federal government to jointly fund specialized training programs which are directly tied to jobs**

Saskatchewan farmers must be allowed to start-up new businesses to process the commodities they produce here in Saskatchewan. This will improve farm incomes, increase value-added processing to diversify the Saskatchewan economy, and provide good jobs in rural Saskatchewan.

- ♦ **a Melenchuk Liberal government will force marketing boards to remove all barriers to value-added processing of farm commodities, by farmer-owned businesses, in Saskatchewan**