



Sask. well positioned to meet change: economist

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Changes in the global marketplace have much to do with aging populations, new demand and the environment, Scotiabank's chief economist said Tuesday.

And he said Saskatchewan is prepared to handle all three challenges

"It's true that there's an influence of the slowdown in the U.S. and other parts of the world, but it's the commodity sector that gives the added buoyancy, the added juice to the economy,"

Warren Jestin said at a Saskatoon business luncheon.

"It's almost a sweet spot in terms of the number of basic commodities that are produced here, not only the agricultural sector and potash but also the uranium and the oil side, which remain very, very favourable."

Saskatchewan's natural resources are acting as a short-term insulation measure against market downturns, while providing the basis for projected long-term demand for food and energy, Jestin said.

The national economy is expected to grow by about two per cent this year, he added, saying western provinces, especially Saskatchewan, are expected to grow by three per cent or more.

"If you look at the demographics of Saskatchewan they've turned dramatically. The population increase is significant, the housing market is certainly stronger here than any other part of the country. All of this provides a lift to the economy, keeping it in the fast track relative to other provinces -- at least the provinces to the east," he said.

While the province may be able to absorb the challenges of the old (a retiring workforce creating a labour crunch), the new (emerging global economies) and the green (a focus on eco-friendly energy solutions), according to Jestin, Saskatchewan residents need to prepare for some major lifestyle changes in the next five to 10 years.

"The basic way we produce things and how we live and what products we consume are going to change dramatically," he explained. "If you go to Europe one of the most pronounced shifts, of course, are more concentrated living spaces but also the size of cars on the road. And you're finding, I think increasingly, the way we build houses and how we approach energy is going to change."

If the government is diligent in building infrastructure and creating education training spaces, he cautioned, Saskatchewan will be able to travel the new global path on smooth pavement as opposed to a rocky trail. The first option is a much easier way to deliver the Saskatchewan-based products the world is calling for.

"Our competitors now aren't just across the street or in the U.S. or in Europe, they're all across the world," Jestin said. "In order to sustain your competitiveness, your

prosperity, your profitability for business, we've got to be cognizant of that."

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