

Population reaches 1,057,884

Upward trend likely to continue

BY ANGELA HALL, LEADER-POST SEPTEMBER 29, 2011

Saskatchewan's population hit an estimated 1,057,884 people this summer, with the 5,444-person increase recorded between April and July the largest quarterly population jump on record, the provincial government said Wednesday.

And as more people call Saskatchewan home, one local statistician says the record population number will probably continue to climb.

Doug Elliott, publisher of the statistical newsletter Sask Trends Monitor, said the rate of population growth might fluctuate going forward, but increases will probably continue for the foreseeable future.

"These things take a long time to change because once Saskatchewan becomes the destination of choice then people tend to come here because their friends are here, or their kids are still here or there's just a buzz about the place," Elliott said.

"As long as the population is growing we need more houses and more restaurant meals and more haircuts and the more tax you get, so it generates its own economic activity which generates more demand for more people."

Elliott said the second quarter numbers from Statistics Canada were a pleasant surprise after the first quarter, where the province increased in population but lost more people to other provinces than it gained. That raised the spectre of a return to the "bad old days," he said.

"But the second quarter reversed that . so it makes it look like that first quarter figure was just a glitch."

Growth came on all fronts in the April 1 to July 1 period, the estimates show. The province drew more people from other provinces for net inter-provincial migration of 1,239, the number of births outpaced deaths for a natural increase of by 1,524 and net international migration was 2,681.

Recording population increases in all three areas is significant, Elliot said.

"In the 1980s and 1990s when folks were leaving the province, we were trying to live on natural growth alone, just births, and that didn't work of course because the population kept going down. And then we started to do the immigration piece, that second element of growth, and that was probably enough, but ideally you do want all three in order to get (a growth rate) above one per cent."

The latest Statistics Canada report pegs the province's annual growth rate at 1.3 per cent.

Premier Brad Wall seized on the positive population figures made public Wednesday, saying the latest estimates show the continued strength of Saskatchewan's economy.

Wall acknowledged the growth also brings challenges, such as a tight housing supply across the province. But he said progress on those issues is being made, citing the recent introduction of a long-term housing plan as an example.

But NDP MLA David Forbes said while the population growth is positive, the Sask. Party government simply hasn't done enough to address housing affordability and should be considering ideas such as rent control. Housing is "the one thing people need to get an anchor in their community," Forbes said.

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