

Getting Saskatchewan Back on Track

Addressing Saskatchewan's Labour Shortage



***Brad Wall and the
Official Opposition
Saskatchewan Party***



A Message from Brad Wall, Leader of the Official Opposition Saskatchewan Party

Saskatchewan people and families have pride in our province. They believe in the tremendous potential that Saskatchewan offers, and deserve a government with a positive vision for the future that will realize this potential.

In September 2004, I released my economic vision paper, *The Promise of Saskatchewan: A New Vision for Saskatchewan's Economy*, with a commitment to consult with stakeholders about our vision for Saskatchewan's future and to provide updates based on those consultations. *Getting Saskatchewan Back on Track* builds on the vision put forward in the *Promise of Saskatchewan*, and is the first update I will

be releasing as we move closer to a provincial election.

Saskatchewan's long-term economic security depends on expanding the number of people that are working in Saskatchewan.

To address the growing labour and skills shortage in our province, a Saskatchewan Party government will create more opportunities for our youth, increase the number of First Nations people in the workforce and expand the number of skilled immigrants coming to Saskatchewan.

A Saskatchewan Party government will also close the growing gap between the labour needs of employers and existing supply of workers by improving skills training in the province and creating Enterprise Saskatchewan — a new partnership between industry, post-secondary institutions, government, First Nations, labour and other economic stakeholders in the province.

Getting Saskatchewan Back on Track builds on our commitment to create long-term sustainable growth in Saskatchewan by reducing barriers to growth, rebuilding our infrastructure and investing in innovation and Saskatchewan's post-secondary institutions. As with all Saskatchewan Party commitments, our plan will be implemented within a balanced budget.

Over the coming months, I will continue to put forward the Saskatchewan Party's vision for a growing and prosperous Saskatchewan with new ideas to improve the quality of life in our province, enhance our economic security and build pride with purpose.

I welcome your ideas and your participation as we work to build a positive future for Saskatchewan.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brad Wall'. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Brad Wall, Leader of the Official Opposition Saskatchewan Party

Getting Saskatchewan Back on Track

Saskatchewan needs a new government with a long-term strategy to address the labour shortage crisis in Saskatchewan.

Brad Wall and the Saskatchewan Party believe it's time to stop talking about the labour force shortage and start taking action. As part of a broader strategy to create a strong economy by reducing barriers to growth and investing in infrastructure, innovation and post-secondary institutions, a Saskatchewan Party government will address Saskatchewan's labour shortage by:

Investing in People: Assisting Employers to Invest in Employee Skills Training and Education.

Enhancing Access to Employment: Building Skills and Supporting the Transition to Work.

Partnering for Shared Prosperity: Enhancing Educational and Employment Opportunities for First Nations and Métis People.

Advancing Education, Innovation and Entrepreneurship: Sustaining Labour Force Growth Through Excellence in Education.

Expanding Opportunities: Reducing Workforce Barriers for Women and Families.

Appreciating Excellence and Experience: Providing Older Workers with Greater Employment Options by Eliminating Mandatory Retirement.

Focusing on Our Future: Retaining our Youth and Increasing Immigration.

It's Time to Address Saskatchewan's Labour Shortage Crisis

“Saskatchewan has a big labour shortage problem, but unlike Alberta their problem is that most of the brightest and youngest are leaving – usually for Alberta.”

*-Todd Hirsch, chief economist with the Canada West Foundation,
“Booming Saskatchewan faces labour shortage, report says,” National Post, Jan.30, 2006.*

The Immediate Labour Shortage Crisis

The labour shortage is both a short-term crisis and a long-term challenge for Saskatchewan's economy. Without available workers, businesses cannot grow or expand. Without a growing workforce, the province's tax base will shrink and the cost of government investment in infrastructure and capital construction will continue to rise.

The immediate crisis is readily apparent in the number of jobs currently unfilled in the province and the concern employers are expressing about the shortage of available labour. Saskatchewan's Minister of Industry and Resources acknowledged in October there are anywhere from 10,000 to 15,000 jobs vacant in Saskatchewan. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that concern over the labour shortage is growing amongst business owners. In August, a Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) survey of its Saskatchewan members found that 84 per cent of Saskatchewan small business owners believe it will be harder to find employees in the next five years. This is consistent with an earlier CFIB survey indicating 64 per cent of Saskatchewan's small and medium-sized business owners are very concerned about the shortage of qualified labour.

The current labour shortage crisis, particularly the shortage of skilled workers in the construction and building trades, is also resulting in construction delays and higher than expected construction costs throughout the province.

Construction on the lab building at the University of Regina is now close to \$30 million over budget, while the College of Law Building at the University of Saskatchewan will cost over \$4 million more than originally estimated – money that the university could otherwise have spent on students. According to Saskatchewan Transportation Company CEO Ray Clayton, the new STC terminal planned for Regina will cost 34 per cent or \$6.5 million more than originally budgeted, while it is estimated the new Regina jail will cost taxpayers \$10 million more than originally planned. The labour shortage is also a factor in construction delays at the new Swift Current hospital and escalating construction costs for the Humboldt Hospital, the latter of which is now estimated to cost \$31 million before it is completed in 2008.

The labour shortage has a real and direct effect on the bottom line of families, businesses, post-secondary institutions, hospitals and schools. It also has a negative effect on government resources. Vacant jobs mean fewer taxpayers, while rising capital costs force the provincial government and public institutions to divert money away from program spending to cover cost overruns. Instead of continuing to fall victim to this vicious cycle, a Saskatchewan Party government would take immediate action to expand Saskatchewan's labour force, thereby ensuring that valuable public resources are not diverted away from the priorities of Saskatchewan people.

The Long-Term Challenge of an Aging Workforce

Using a medium-growth scenario, Statistics Canada projects that the number of seniors in Saskatchewan will increase from approximately 147,000 in 2006 to more than 243,000 by 2031. Saskatchewan statistician Doug Elliot has also noted that without increasing participation rates, the size of the provincial labour force will begin to decline after 2010 and fall below its current level by 2020.

In this demographic environment, labour shortages in critical occupations are likely to become the norm rather than the exception. Addressing the labour shortage is therefore both an immediate concern and long term necessity for the province. Without action to increase the number of people working in the province, the provincial government will have no choice but to force a shrinking tax base to pay more taxes to fund the increasing costs of education and health care.

The Problem and the Solution

Saskatchewan's labour shortage crisis exists for two reasons. First, Saskatchewan does not have enough people in the workforce to sustain long-term economic growth. Second, there is a growing gap between the labour needs of employers and the existing supply of workers. Without action to address these two challenges, Saskatchewan's economy cannot grow.

Getting Saskatchewan Back on Track: Expanding the Workforce

For nine out of the last ten years Saskatchewan's population has shrunk. According to the latest national population statistics released by Statistics Canada, Saskatchewan suffered a net loss of 4,571 people between July 1, 2005 and July 1, 2006. At a time when every western province is experiencing a population increase (even Manitoba's population grew by 3,617 people over the same period) Saskatchewan continues to lose population under the NDP government.

Reflecting and reinforcing this crisis is the fact that a significant number of our young people indicate they plan to leave Saskatchewan in the next five years. In a recent survey of those under the age of 35 conducted by the Canada West Foundation, more than 25 per cent indicated that they anticipated leaving Saskatchewan within the next five years. This is the highest percentage in Western Canada. As the authors of the report note in their comments on the effects of outmigration,

“Given that under 35s represent not only a significant proportion of a province's current and future work force and tax base, but also a province's current and future parents (and thus the suppliers of the next generation of workers, taxpayers and parents), a high number of under 35s anticipating a move out of province represents a worrisome trend.”

Retaining our youth, attracting more young people and young workers to Saskatchewan, increasing First Nations participation in the workforce and expanding the number of skilled immigrants to our province are all key elements in a Saskatchewan Party government's plan to ensure that Saskatchewan has enough workers to sustain long-term economic growth.

Getting Saskatchewan Back on Track:

Addressing the Growing Gap Between the Needs of Employers and the Supply of Workers

In addition to the NDP government's failure to position Saskatchewan as a competitive jurisdiction that can attract, retain and develop skilled workers, the current government has failed to address the significant gaps that have emerged between the needs of employers and the supply of workers in the province.

At a time when employers are desperately looking for employees, the number of employable people receiving social assistance continues to remain higher than it should be. Meanwhile, students seeking entrance to programs at SIAST continue to sit on waiting lists. The Saskatchewan Party believes that addressing these barriers, while empowering experienced workers in the workforce, is vital to developing a sustainable labour force. We also recognize that enhancing social supports such as adequate child care and care for seniors will assist families to manage the challenges of balancing work with family responsibilities.

Most importantly, a Saskatchewan Party government will close the gap between the needs of employers and the development of a skilled workforce by facilitating more direct partnerships between industry and the province's educational institutions.

In the *Promise of Saskatchewan: A New Vision for Saskatchewan's Economy*, Saskatchewan Party Leader Brad Wall stated that the first task of a Saskatchewan Party government will be the creation of Enterprise Saskatchewan, a new economic development agency that will replace the line department economic development function of government. Enterprise Saskatchewan will function as a unique public-private partnership, with a board that includes stakeholders from government, industry, First Nations, labour, post-secondary institutions and other economic stakeholders. The fact that Enterprise Saskatchewan will be structured as a central agency of government, and that its board will be chaired by a non-government representative, demonstrates the commitment of a Saskatchewan Party government to return control of the economy back to the economic stakeholders of the province.

Enterprise Saskatchewan will be uniquely suited to lead a Saskatchewan Party government's response to the labour shortage crisis. Through the direct input of all economic stakeholders in the province, Enterprise Saskatchewan will focus on closing the gap that currently exists between the needs of industry and the development of a skilled and professional workforce. By ensuring that training and education programs in the province are meeting the needs of the economy and that Saskatchewan becomes and remains a competitive jurisdiction to attract, develop and retain skilled workers, a Saskatchewan Party government will make Saskatchewan the best place in Canada to start and build a career.

Now is the Time to Address the Labour Force Shortage

With the advantage of higher than average natural resource prices, the current government has a unique opportunity to reinvest its growing surplus back into the people of the province. Instead, the NDP continues to be on the wrong track. Wasting valuable public tax dollars on expensive advertising campaigns and money-losing investments won't address the labour shortage crisis in Saskatchewan – a change of government will.

It's time to get Saskatchewan back on the right track. A Saskatchewan Party government would invest the province's growing surplus back into the people of Saskatchewan, while making long-term changes to ensure that Saskatchewan becomes known as 'the place to be,' not 'the place to be from.' As with all measures undertaken by a Saskatchewan Party government, a strategy to address Saskatchewan's labour shortage will be accomplished within a balanced budget.

Building a skilled workforce will allow Saskatchewan to weather the boom and bust cycle of natural resource prices. Along with our plan to create a vibrant economy by reducing barriers to growth and investing in infrastructure, innovation and post-secondary institutions, a Saskatchewan Party government's labour force development strategy will ensure that Saskatchewan becomes, and remains, a competitive jurisdiction for skilled labour for decades to come.

Getting Saskatchewan Back on Track

The Saskatchewan Party's Plan to Address Saskatchewan's Labour Shortage

The NDP government's failure to develop and act on a comprehensive strategy to address the province's labour shortage has created a significant barrier to growth for Saskatchewan's economy. Unlike the Government of Alberta which launched a 10-year strategy to address the labour shortage in that province, Saskatchewan's NDP government has failed to put forward a plan to attract, recruit, develop and retain skilled workers.

It's time to get Saskatchewan back on track.

Brad Wall and a Saskatchewan Party government will chart a new course for sustained and shared prosperity in the 21st century. Under a Saskatchewan Party government, Enterprise Saskatchewan will be the lead agency in coordinating a seven point strategy to address Saskatchewan's labour shortage, build a skilled workforce and ensure that everyone in the province has the opportunity to participate in a thriving economy. Our seven point plan to address Saskatchewan's labour force shortage will:

Invest in People by Assisting Employers to Invest in Employee Skills Training and Education.

Enhance Access to Employment by Building Skills and Supporting the Transition to Work.

Create Partnerships for Shared Prosperity by Enhancing Employment and Educational Opportunities for First Nations and Métis People.

Advance Education, Innovation and Entrepreneurship by Sustaining Labour Force Growth Through Excellence in Education.

Expand Opportunities by Reducing Workforce Barriers for Women and Families.

Appreciate Excellence and Experience by Providing Older Workers with Greater Employment Options by Eliminating Mandatory Retirement.

Focus on Our Future by Retaining our Youth and Increasing Immigration.

Investing in People: Assisting Employers to Invest in Employee Skills Training and Education

A Saskatchewan Party government will ensure that both employees and employers benefit from a growth agenda and that investment in employee skills development is rewarded by:

- Providing new tax incentives for employer investments in formal education and on-the-job-training for employees;
- Providing new tax incentives to encourage the expansion of business and industry funding of training seats and targeted educational initiatives at our post-secondary institutions;
- Facilitating the expansion of co-operative education spaces in our post-secondary institutions;
- Creating more apprenticeship capacity in the province, including immediately reviewing the journeyman to apprentice ratio, and;
- A provincial commitment to match the federal government's new apprenticeship tax credit of up to \$2,000 per year for employers who hire and train apprentices and \$1,000 grants for apprentices under the new federal Apprenticeship Incentive Program which begins January 1, 2007.

Enhance Access to Employment: Building Skills and Supporting the Transition to Work.

While the current government continues to boast of its success in moving people from the Social Assistance Program (SAP) to the Transitional Employment Allowance (TEA) program, it has admitted that it does not systematically track whether people leaving TEA are moving into full employment. In fact, the government's best guess, based on a survey done in 2002 and further analysis in 2005, is that only 40% of those involved in the TEA program were employed within a short period of time after leaving the system.

The people of Saskatchewan deserve better results from their government. In a province where jobs are going unfilled, there is no reason that anyone in Saskatchewan over the age of 18 who is employable should not be working, going to school or actively engaged in upgrading their skills.

A Saskatchewan Party government will improve accountability in the delivery of training programs while assisting under-skilled individuals and employable persons on assistance to become employed by:

- Investing \$5 million into an employment readiness fund that can be accessed by community based organizations (CBOs) such as food banks, to develop and deliver life skills and employment readiness training to their clients;
- Assisting in the development of new employment and labour readiness partnerships between CBOs and the private sector;
- Ensuring training programs are delivered with the input of employers and are geared towards local labour market needs;

- Increasing the amount that social assistance clients can earn as they make the transition from assistance to work, and;
- Ensuring that social assistance recipients who make the transition to work have access to the necessary financial resources to pay for initial work related expenses.

A Saskatchewan Party government will also work to expand employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, in partnership with the Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centers and the Saskatchewan Abilities Council.

Partnership for Shared Prosperity: Enhancing Educational and Employment Opportunities with First Nations and Métis People

Despite the fact that Saskatchewan's population is aging, we have the benefit of a young First Nations and Métis population that will play a pivotal role in maintaining Saskatchewan's workforce in the future. As of December 2005, however, First Nations people had an employment rate of less than 44 per cent — a full 20 per cent less than the non-Aboriginal population in Saskatchewan. Capitalizing on the advantage of a young First Nations population will require a concerted effort between First Nations and the federal and provincial governments to make First Nations employment, education and skills development a priority.

In the spirit of the Treaties, a Saskatchewan Party government will enhance its partnership with Saskatchewan's First Nations to increase First Nations participation in the labour force over the next decade. A Saskatchewan Party government will also work in partnership with Métis people to increase Métis representation in the workforce.

Since the board of Enterprise Saskatchewan will contain representation from First Nations, government, industry, post-secondary institutions, municipalities and regional economic development authorities, it will be uniquely positioned to foster a partnership for shared prosperity. The key elements in a strategy to increase First Nations and Métis representation in the workforce will include:

- Increased emphasis on improving education outcomes for First Nations students, including higher graduation rates from high school;
- Increased funding to the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies and post-secondary institutions in the province to expand First Nations and Métis participation in academic preparation, employment development, training and professional programs;
- Active promotion of First Nations and Métis youth entrepreneurship;
- Increased financial support to assist the successful efforts of the construction industry in developing its First Nations workforce, including long-term funding for the Construction Career Projects program and expansion of this model to other key sectors of the economy;
- Partnerships with post-secondary institutions, the federal government and First Nations bands to deliver job and skills training on reserves, and;
- Development of a northern skills development strategy, in partnership with First Nations.

Advancing Education, Innovation and Entrepreneurship: Sustaining Labour Force Growth Through Excellence in Education

Any successful growth agenda for Saskatchewan must include a commitment to long-term investments in post-secondary institutions and enhanced partnerships between employers, government and educational institutions.

Through Enterprise Saskatchewan, a Saskatchewan Party government will ensure that industry, REDAs, post-secondary institutions and economic stakeholders across the province work together collaboratively to build and sustain a skilled workforce in our province. A Saskatchewan Party government's new approach to developing Saskatchewan's workforce will emphasize greater accountability, stronger coordination and collaboration between stakeholders, flexibility in program delivery and rapid responses to meet local and provincial labour force needs.

Making Skills Training and Investment in Innovation a Priority

A Saskatchewan Party government will:

- Commit to long-term funding increases for the province's post-secondary institutions;
- Support a greater role for Saskatchewan's regional colleges in developing and delivering programs to meet local labour force needs;
- Make better use of existing facilities within communities to deliver innovative training and skills development programs to local residents;
- Incorporate the current functions of the Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission and the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board into Enterprise Saskatchewan;
- Ensure that training programs and training seats at SIAST are more closely aligned with current labour force needs and future needs arising as a result of a Saskatchewan Party government's growth agenda;
- Increase funding to the province's two universities to establish centres of excellence and innovation in the applied sciences, and promote innovation in technology and education in growth areas of the economy, and;
- Provide expanded support for investments in research and the commercialization of research and innovation at Saskatchewan's two universities, while ensuring that the outcomes of these investments are consistent with international standards. This would include increasing the existing provincial R&D Tax Credit from 15 per cent to 20 per cent.

Literacy and Adult Education

For Saskatchewan to be successful and build a 21st century labour force, it is essential that all individuals in the province have the necessary skills and experience to move up the knowledge ladder. To ensure that this goal is achieved for both youth and adults, a Saskatchewan Party government will:

- Provide long-term sustainable funding increases for adult basic education and literacy in Saskatchewan; including workforce literacy and life skills programs delivered through educational and community based organizations.

Skills Training, Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Schools

The Department of Learning will also engage industry and post-secondary institutions to:

- Aggressively promote the skilled trades as a viable and rewarding career choice in high schools;
- Implement a comprehensive career awareness program for young people in cooperation with industry, Crown corporations and Saskatchewan's trades and professional associations.
- Ensure that every high school student in Saskatchewan has the opportunity to develop business literacy skills and entrepreneurial experience. A Saskatchewan Party government will accomplish this by expanding the availability of business education and entrepreneurial training to every high school in Saskatchewan, including providing students with increased opportunities to gain business experience through innovative partnerships with industry, local businesses and community organizations;
- Develop a closer working relationship between schools in the K-12 system and the province's post-secondary institutions through the creation of innovation schools within the K-12 system.

Expanding Opportunities: Reducing Workforce Barriers for Women and Families

Improving opportunities for women to enter the workforce and build careers is an important component of a strategy to address Saskatchewan's labour shortage.

One of the central barriers that women face to entry, re-entry and ongoing career development in the workforce is obtaining accessible child care. While parents need support and viable child care options in their community, the provincial government's own data indicates that a one-size fits all approach will not work in Saskatchewan.

Parents need flexible child care options to meet their needs. A Saskatchewan Party government will respect the fact that the majority of parents utilize a combination of child care options, including having family members, community-based child care providers and neighbourhood child care providers care for their children. To assist working families:

- A Saskatchewan Party government will support enhanced options for early learning and flexible child care in Saskatchewan.

Families also shoulder much of the responsibility for caring for aging parents. The pressures on the "sandwich generation" mean that governments and employers must begin to make a concerted effort to ensure that workplaces are family friendly and provide employees with the necessary flexibility to balance the demands of work and family life.

To assist in creating flexibility for women and families in the workforce, a Saskatchewan Party government will:

- Encourage employers to take steps to create a flexible work environment to assist in attracting and retaining employees whenever possible, and;

- Provide increased support for home care to allow seniors to remain in their own homes for as long as possible.

Appreciating Excellence and Experience: Providing Older Workers with Greater Employment Options by Eliminating Mandatory Retirement

Older workers deserve every opportunity to continue to play a vital role in the workforce if they so choose. Statistician Doug Elliot projects that in the next ten years there will be an increase in the number of employees in their fifties, and that the number of persons over 60 in the labour force in Saskatchewan will increase from approximately 40,000 today to 60,000 by 2020.

The Saskatchewan Party recognizes that older workers bring value to the economy, and that it is discriminatory for the provincial government to force workers to retire at age 65 against their wishes. Following consultations with both business and labour to ensure that changes to mandatory retirement will serve and respect the interests of both employers and employees:

- A Saskatchewan Party government will put forward legislation enabling employees to continue working beyond the age of 65 if they choose.

Focusing on Our Future: Retaining our Youth and Increasing Immigration

Making Saskatchewan ‘the place to be,’ not ‘the place to be from,’ begins with providing youth with every opportunity to pursue their future here in Saskatchewan. Retaining our youth and increasing the immigration of skilled workers to Saskatchewan are essential elements of a growing economy.

Youth Retention

Innovation and creativity are the fundamental economic drivers in the new economy. If Saskatchewan is to be competitive in the short and long term, it is essential that we do everything possible to foster a province where the new ideas and creativity of youth becomes the foundation for innovation. As Todd Hirsch from the Canada West Foundation has commented: “in the long run, it’s not lower taxes that will keep tomorrow’s economy healthy, it’s new ideas.....[e]ven the most level playing field in the world will lie empty if we don’t equip our labour force with the creativity and innovation they need to play the game.”

Saskatchewan’s post-secondary institutions play a significant role as a magnet for retaining our youth and attracting youth from Canada and the world to come to Saskatchewan. A Saskatchewan Party government will make affordability, accessibility, excellence and innovation in post-secondary education the cornerstone of our youth retention strategy through the initiatives outlined in point four of our plan – Advancing Education, Innovation and Entrepreneurship. As a result of our plan to address the labour shortage, remove barriers to growth in the economy and invest in infrastructure, innovation and post-secondary education, Saskatchewan’s growing economy will provide our youth with every opportunity to attend school, enhance their skills and build their careers here in Saskatchewan.

As part of a broader initiative to retain our youth and make Saskatchewan the place to be:

- Enterprise Saskatchewan will spearhead “opportunity missions” within Saskatchewan, across Canada and throughout the world to inform youth of the options and opportunities available to them in Saskatchewan. These missions will feature significant representation from youth leaders across the province telling the Saskatchewan story, in addition to industry leaders in growth sectors of the economy, educational leaders and senior government officials.
- A Saskatchewan Party government will work actively to support the efforts of non-government organizations to promote the benefits of Saskatchewan to youth, such as the Saskatchewan Rotary’s “Your Future is Here” initiative.
- A Saskatchewan Party government will make the promotion of Saskatchewan opportunities a top priority on post-secondary campuses in the province.

Immigration

Attracting new people to Saskatchewan through increased immigration must continue to be a priority for the provincial government. While the current government has taken action to increase immigration targets under the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program (SINP), Saskatchewan continues to lag behind Manitoba in its immigration expectations.

It is particularly important that sectors such as the trucking and transportation sector, which have been proactive in recruiting immigrants to Saskatchewan, are supported by a provincial government that places a priority on expanding the immigration of professionals, skilled workers and entrepreneurs while streamlining the process of locating to Saskatchewan. To facilitate the attraction of skilled immigrants to Saskatchewan, Enterprise Saskatchewan will:

- Lead international recruitment missions comprised of industry, post-secondary institutions and representatives of the provincial government to attract foreign students and skilled workers to Saskatchewan;
- Fast-track the entry of skilled foreign workers and professionals into Saskatchewan;
- Make the attraction of foreign entrepreneurs a priority;
- Reduce barriers for foreign and Canadian workers and professionals seeking to come to Saskatchewan by working with professional regulatory bodies to streamline recognition and acceptance of foreign credentials, and;
- Work actively with the federal government to reduce barriers to long-term employment for foreign students who graduate from Saskatchewan universities and wish to continue working in Saskatchewan after graduation.

Enterprise Saskatchewan will constantly review whether targets for the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program and immigration in general are being achieved, and will increase targets once goals have been met.

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