



Leadership Saskatoon cordially invites you to

# **“Fireside Chats” 2009-2010**

## *The Community Series*

**Wednesday, 14 October, 2009**

**ERIC CLINE**

Lawyer, Former Politician, Corporate Executive

**"Nerve, Landscape Assessment, Leadership and Change"**

Saskatoon Club, 417-21<sup>st</sup> Street East  
7:30 p.m. (discussion to follow)

Leadership Saskatoon began in 2000 with a mission to develop effective collaborative leaders whose awareness, understanding, engagement, and commitment will strengthen Saskatoon as an inclusive and caring civic community. This year's series will focus on community leaders.

All are welcome and there is no charge. However space is limited, so you must reserve your seat. For more information, or to confirm your attendance, please call the Leadership Saskatoon Office at (306) 683-2265.



This series is sponsored by *Cherry Insurance*.  
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## Nerve, Landscape Assessment, Leadership and Change

Eric Cline

Fireside Chat: Leadership Saskatoon  
Saskatoon Club, October 14, 2009



Good evening, everyone.

This evening, I am going to talk about the nature of "leadership", how government leaders can work with community leaders and how each person should try to provide leadership. I am going to assert that leadership involves courage, wise choices and commitment to making changes for the better.

Let me begin by saying that I believe most leaders accomplish purposes through well-organized systems. Leaders are dispersed throughout all segments of the community and society -- not just at the elected level, but everywhere: in charities, religious organizations, recreational associations, professions, vocations, business organizations, unions, the workplace, etc.

Leadership is necessary throughout society.

A few years ago, I attended a dinner in Saskatoon at which the guest speaker was a former Premier of Alberta. He was asked to speak to a group of young people and others on the subject of "leadership".

His message to the audience was essentially this: "If you want to lead, go out, find a parade and get in front of it."

I couldn't agree less with this version of leadership.

Why would one want a leader who did not offer a principled vision aimed at improving society?

Why would one need a leader to take you in the same direction?

In other words, leadership seeks to make a positive new contribution to improving things.

The late American President, Harry Truman, once said:

"In periods where there is no leadership, society stands still. Progress occurs when courageous, skillful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better."

So, let's examine the elements of leadership included in President Truman's statement. He refers to the element of courage required to motivate and challenge people, and skill to recognize the need for change and to accomplish the work necessary to change things for the better.

Let me deal with the first aspect, namely courage or what I referred to in the title of my presentation tonight as "nerve".

Courage involves standing upon conviction to fundamental principles. That enables leaders to persevere in the face of opposition, even if they experience rejection or defeat in the short run.

Various examples of courage in leadership come to mind.

When Brian Mulroney promoted and achieved Canada-US Free Trade, it was controversial. Clearly, he and his government believed it was the best course for Canada, and there is plenty of argument to support that view. But there was much public debate and difficult economic adjustment which had to occur for Free Trade to be achieved. When Mr. Mulroney promoted this vision, I don't think he was just opportunistically getting in front of a parade. He had the courage to create a parade.

That is leadership.

When T.C. Douglas and Woodrow Lloyd legislated Medicare in Saskatchewan in the face of extremely determined opposition, they, too, acted on principle -- a principle that gave them courage to act.

One thinks of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, Churchill in the second world war, President Johnson and civil rights, President Obama and health reform in the United States, Prime Minister Pearson in the flag debate or Trudeau and patriation of the Canadian Constitution.

These are examples of policies promoted by courageous leaders because they believed that their policies would make society better.

On the other hand, one can think of examples where the easy road is taken because it is the popular one. Arguably, for example, the current federal government's decision to cut the GST by two points is a popular move, but it is not good tax policy in terms of either economic development or fiscal prudence. I would argue that this was a very popular move, but not a courageous one, and not one involving any real leadership.

By contrast, in the 1986 Saskatchewan provincial election Liberal leader Ralph Goodale told the public that he would not become involved in a bidding war to buy their votes. He explained that the policies of both the Conservatives and the NDP at that time were not fiscally sustainable. He was right. But, people didn't want to be told they couldn't have everything they desired. Mr. Goodale's position at the time was courageous, and I would call it an example of leadership. He only won one seat, however, so his bold leadership was not rewarded by the voting public, which illustrates that leadership is not only short-term or selfish.

That brings me to the second aspect of leadership I will mention: "landscape assessment". By that I mean the need to realistically assess what is possible. There is no point proposing something that may make sense on some level, but which is impossible because

people will not accept it either at that point in time, or without some other process or change occurring.

I can think of examples from my time in government where significant reforms were achieved. Health reform, fiscal reform and personal income tax reform come to mind. All of them were controversial, but necessary, and you had to take on the critics and get them done. In the case of health care reform, it wiped out the NDP in rural Saskatchewan. But it was a necessary policy change.

Some things are tough, but they are necessary, and you need the nerve to do them, even if, in the short term, you cannot persuade the voters.

Still, you cannot go too far, either. You have to know what can realistically be achieved. For example, when it came to rural municipal amalgamation as proposed by the Garcea Report to the Romanow government, you had a good blueprint, but one that would not work because the rural municipal community was not prepared to accept it. They held a referendum in which over 90% of people voted it down. It may have been good policy, but it would never work because the community would not accept it. It was the sort of thing that, if people wanted to prove that it didn't work, they would do so. The government wisely retreated from its good idea.

The ability to effect change may involve timing, such as Churchill being there to step in to fill the leadership vacuum created by Chamberlain. Was this an accident of history? Did Churchill just arrive at the right time? Was greatness thrust upon him, as is sometimes said to happen? Or does it involve a basic instinct that leaders possess, to know what needs to be done at a given time?

It takes a great deal of skill, or perhaps basic instinct, to find a balance between the need for principled action and the comfort level of society for change, remembering that change does tend to upset a lot of people.

To return to where I started: I don't think leadership is about getting in front of a parade. Good leadership, however, surely is more successful where leaders in government or elsewhere communicate effectively and persuasively to get their points across and work with others to gain allies, build partnerships and conscript resources and talent to make collective efforts go further.

This brings me to the next part of my presentation, namely how government leaders can work with community leaders.

I said at the outset that leadership exists throughout society. All across Saskatchewan, hundreds of community activists

volunteer to oversee the organizations which run the dozens of rehabilitation centers where people with intellectual and physical challenges work or participate in activities. Together, they form the Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centers, or SARC. They are always looking for good ways to meaningfully engage their clients.

At the same time, government had a goal of recycling more beverage containers.

The decision of the Devine government in the 1980s to create SARCAN, working with dozens of rehabilitation centers and community activists in every corner of the province, and employing challenged people who need work while at the same time, achieving environmental goals is certainly a good example of how government and community leadership can work together.

It involves a partnership between government, setting the policy that we all have to pay a deposit on our beverage containers and involving so many non-profit community organizations conscripted to deliver the service and employ people.

Government and community leaders working together: how do you make this happen? In the case of SARC, I can tell you that they have a well-organized annual campaign to keep MLAs and cabinet ministers fully informed of their activities. This involves meetings between their Executive Director and board members and ministers directly involved in making policy that might affect them, e.g. Community Resources and Finance. As well, each year they have a reception at which people from all over the province have displays informing all of the MLAs about their diverse activities.

At the same time, of course, they work to maintain a good rapport with the non-elected policymakers, the public service.

Sometimes, community leadership takes a less regularized, but also effective route to government. I can remember Peter Whitenect and another individual from the Saskatoon Rotary Club coming to see me when I was a minister from Saskatoon. They wanted to do a restorative justice program at Mount Royal Collegiate as a way to encourage non-violent resolution of disputes and to train young people to mentor others in non-violent dispute resolution. They wanted me to help them get some financing from the Department of Justice to finance a program which they themselves were also supporting.

The Rotary Club has a lot of able, experienced people from the community trying to do beneficial things for young people in particular. When you work with people like this, you know, again, that you have the advantage in government of working with good talent at low cost, since you have a group of well motivated and smart people donating their time and talents.

Why wouldn't you want to work with talent when it is offered, especially when its goal is obviously a shared one?

Just as government can work with community-based social service agencies or service clubs, so too it can and should work in partnership with other parts of society, such as the business community.

Think about the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership, or STEP, which combined employees and resources of government and the province's exporters to market our goods around the world, or Tourism Saskatchewan, where the government people and the tourism industry were brought together to advance tourism in Saskatchewan, or the Apprenticeship Commission which brought together training officials from government and the industrial sector which employs tradespeople. All of these partnerships were conceived

by the Romanow government in the 1990s, and, like SARCAN, involved new partnerships between government and community, in these cases the business sector.

The same could be said about the Scrap Tire Corp. or the oil recycling system where government imposes environmental levies to fund industry efforts to achieve environmental objectives.

Think about the Romanow government's partnership with the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations resulting in SIGA, which replaced a dispute between government and First Nations over gambling with a successful partnership which employs many hundreds of aboriginal people. That came about as a way to resolve a dispute between First Nations and government over jurisdiction to run casinos. An impasse led both parties to the point where they wanted an "out" outside of the legal system, and a creative partnership gave them that out. The solution, in that instance, came out of dispute and conflict.

Think about the lease requirements imposed by government on uranium companies requiring them to work with First Nations and Northerners as a condition of mining uranium, and the partnerships that that government policy has brought about between the uranium companies and the highly successful Lac la Ronge Indian Band and the Athabasca Basin Partnership. That came out of a commission of inquiry created by Allan Blakeney in the 1970s, which engaged Northerners in a dialogue concerning how uranium mining should be done. So, that was a partnership that came about by inviting community members to come forward in a more formal way to dialogue with policy makers.

Think about the Meewasin Valley Authority, a partnership between the province, the city, the RM of Corman Park and the University, and what that partnership has meant for the City of Saskatoon. That involved dialogue between community leaders who were elected to the city, to the RM and to the provincial government, as well as administrators of the University.

One of the things that I quickly learned when I became a member of the legislature in 1991 was that many successful ventures in government involve working in partnership with other entities. This can involve actual partnerships to deliver certain programs, as I have discussed above. Or, in the policymaking area, it may simply involve careful dialogue with all stakeholders concerned, in an effort to listen and learn and to try to strike the right balance between the inevitably competing parts of society.

That brings me to the final part of my presentation, which might be thought of as leadership on the personal level, or civic responsibility.

When I was out on the doorsteps for 17 years trying to be an MLA, I would occasionally run into people who would say: "I don't believe in parties, politicians or politics", or words to that effect.

I would always reply: "Do you believe in democracy?" Of course, the answer was always "yes". Then I would simply ask: "How do you have a democracy without politicians and political parties?"

As we know, in federal and provincial elections, maybe one third of the people don't vote and, in civic elections, maybe two thirds of the people don't vote.

To me, this is very sad, and I'm not one of those people who just blame the politicians for breeding cynicism. I am prepared also to lay blame at the individual level, i.e. to say that each and every person needs to have the attitude that they should take personal leadership by being involved as a citizen.

If you don't like current politicians, go out and get new ones, or do it yourself, that's what I say.

The bare minimum for this is to exercise what should be a cherished right, i.e. the right to vote in a free and democratic society.

At the same time, if this attitude is not ingrained in our people, then we as a society are failing. When we are able to hear people brag that they do not vote, with an air of superiority, and without this being regarded as socially repugnant such as smoking has become, we are failing to forge the sort of social consensus we should have.

I think it would be good to have a discussion of what the options might be for us to change this. Maybe we need to teach civics in school and to bring up a new generation of people who are taught that it is their responsibility to take part in voting and, if possible, in public affairs generally. I know that in the modest household that I grew up in our parents told us that we should read a newspaper every day and that it was very important to exercise the right to vote.

I believe politics is a very noble calling, because it is so central to our democratic system, which is so important and basic to our way of life. People should want to be involved in it. It is one way to serve, but not the only way. The efforts of people at so many activities -- the NGOs like SARC, the service clubs, the thousands upon thousands of sports and recreation people and the leaders of vocations, professions, business and labour organizations.

## SUMMARY

In summary, I would suggest, as Harry Truman said, that true leaders display courage, they display wise discernment of what can be done, and they try to bring about change which will make society better than it otherwise would be.

I would also suggest that those who wish to be led by inspired leaders must assume the responsibility of citizenship and be somewhat engaged in the political process. We need to dedicate ourselves to reversing the trend toward nonparticipation. We owe it, in my opinion, not only to the people who fought for universal franchise, but out of respect for the hundreds of millions of people throughout the world who do not enjoy the freedoms we have.

Best wishes as you tackle the issue of leadership, and thank you for inviting me to introduce the topic.