

Yorkton Stories

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Five Yorkton teens: the road from here to elected office

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Dick DeRyk

They were, it seems, quite typical teenage boys, some born in Yorkton, some who moved here when still young, growing up in the city in the nineteen seventies and eighties, and into the early nineties. They came from various backgrounds. Their parents were business people, employees of businesses, teachers.

They were all part of Generation X, two right on the borderline. But whether that is relevant when looking at what turned out to be their future is strictly a matter of interesting conjecture.

The other common factor for these five young men from Yorkton is that they all ended up at higher level of politics. Three are now members of Parliament, one was an Alberta cabinet minister, one is an Alberta cabinet minister. All of them represent conservative parties, even though they were definitely exposed to a wider range of political views back then, as is inevitable when we're talking about Saskatchewan. Four of the five had moved to Alberta and entered politics there, one moved to Saskatoon and still lives there.

I don't know if it's unusual for a city of, in those years 15,000 or so people, to have been the home of and raised five politicians at those levels. Probably not unusual for the Vancouvers and Toronto's and Montreals of our country. But we're talking about Yorkton where something at some point somehow sent these young fellows in very similar directions.

We talked to them about their youth in Yorkton, their influences in life, and their views of how politics happens today. We agreed from the start that this podcast would not get into partisan political issues, but we did talk about their own styles of politics. We agreed we would talk about Yorkton, their lives here, and how it influenced them as they became adults and moved forward.

And that's what you will hear as we talk to members of Parliament John Barlow, Brad Redekopp, and first elected in spring, Burton Bailey, as well as Alberta Cabinet Minister Searle Turton and former Alberta MLA and Cabinet Minister Dave Rodney.

We start with the longest serving of the members of Parliament, John Barlow, who represents the riding of Foothills in Alberta, a vast expanse of land stretching from just

south and west of Calgary down to the U.S. border, and from Vulcan and Fort Macleod in the east, to the mountains, Pincher Creek, Crowsnest Pass, and Waterton Park. He moved to Yorkton in 1986. His mother Denise worked for North Eastern Cablevision. He attended Composite Junior High and the Yorkton Regional High School. Before getting into politics, he was a journalist, working for the Calgary Sun, doing freelance work, and then as editor of the Western Wheel newspaper in Okotoks. First elected as MP for Macleod in the 2014 byelection, he ran in the reconfigured riding of Foothills in 2015 and in every federal election since. Prior to that, he had run for the Alberta Progressive Conservatives in a provincial election in 2012, losing to Wild Rose leader Danielle Smith, now the Alberta Premier. In Parliament, he has been the Conservative shadow minister for agriculture, agri food, and food security almost continuously since 2019.

Was there anything in your youth that piqued your interest in where you ended up now in politics? Or did that come later?

John Barlow

I think I was always interested in history and current affairs, and I love social studies. I had some great teachers. So I think that's really kind of what piqued it at an early age. And my grandfather was a staunch NDPer, ran for the NDP provincially in Regina before I was born, so I think it's kind of in the family blood.

He's always told me when he lived in York in his later years, and he always said, you know, I'm really proud of you that you were elected and represent us in the House of Commons, but I'm very disappointed in the party you picked. So I think it took him a little bit of time to come around, but I don't think he would have ever voted for me, but he was proud of me becoming a member of parliament.

Dick DeRyk

Of the five that we're talking to, all are conservatives. Back in the day when you were young, the NDP was a force to be reckoned with. And I'm wondering if growing up in Yorkton in the 70s, 80s, early 90s had any influence on where you ended up leaning as far as politics later in life. Is there any connection there?

John Barlow

No, I don't think I could point to something that would specifically have made me lean, you know, conservative from Yorkton. I think it was more of how the province of Saskatchewan was doing. And certainly when I was getting into high school, so many of my friends and those who graduated before me were going to Alberta. They wanted the Alberta advantage, and that's all we heard about is seeing everybody leaving Saskatchewan for the greener pastures of Alberta. And when I moved to Alberta soon after graduation, it was like a breath of fresh air. You could just see their entrepreneurship. I don't think that really fomented itself in me until I moved to Alberta.

Dick DeRyk

They went to Alberta if they wanted to find work or be entrepreneurial. They went to BC if they were retiring. That was kind of the trend at the time.

John Barlow

I distinctly remember my father saying, you know, it's time for you to go to Alberta. There's not a future here in Saskatchewan. Then when the NDP went in Alberta in 2015, he was the first to call me and ask me if I was moving home. So it does kind of come full circle after a while.

Dick DeRyk

What are you passionate about in your role as an MP that might have been something that you acquired as you were growing up?

John Barlow

Yeah, you know, I never spent a lot of time on the farms. You know, we had a farm in the family on my mom's side, and you know, we did spend some time out there when I was young, but I grew up in Yorkton with most of the kids who were farm kids, and I just love spending time at friends' farms, and whether that was helping at branding or just tossing bales around.

So I think that really became instilled in me when I was in Yorkton growing up, and I think that's just carried on to my job as a shadow minister for agriculture and agri food. It's just an industry I'm incredibly passionate about. I love the people who are involved in that industry. They're such an important part of our rural communities, which Yorkton is one.

And to see how Yorkton has changed over the years with you know the crush plants and potash mines, it's really exciting to see. So that was definitely instilled in me in Yorkton, that way of life, that work ethic, and just the type of people who are involved in that. One of my high school girlfriends, they had a farm near Springside, and so I spent a lot of time out there, and you know, great people, and I just think that I carried that on.

Dick DeRyk

What is your most enduring memory of Yorkton?

John Barlow

You know, some of my best times were playing slopitch and the Red Eye out at York Lake, and we had such a great group of friends, you know, playing teams from Langenburg and Springside and Theodore. You know, we just looked forward to the summer so much and getting out in those tournaments in the small towns, and that group of friends and that camaraderie and the Red Eye tournament, we looked forward to that so much, you know, 24-hour ball. Those are the memories that I that I really hold dear and you know, still friends with a lot of the guys who I played ball with.

Dick DeRyk

Politics in Canada, not as much as in the United States, but still have become nasty.

John Barlow

Yeah, divisive, yeah.

Dick DeRyk

Divisive, nasty. What is your style of politics? When you're dealing with your work as a member of Parliament, what is your approach to others and to the work that you have to do?

John Barlow

Yeah, I think the people who have known me most of my life would not be surprised that I've really prided myself on a good working relationship with the people that I deal with here. And I've developed friendships with members from all different parties, you know, NDP, Liberal, Bloc. The Greens are a little bit tougher, Elizabeth May's a tougher nut to crack. But no, I truly believe if you want to get things done and accomplish things, you need to work together, you need to put the partisanship aside.

Certainly during question period, it can get a bit a little bit more dramatic. But I think behind the scenes when you're at committee or you're in the hallway, you know, certainly if I'm having a beer with a couple friends after a pretty long day here and I see a Liberal member walk in and we'll certainly invite them over and let's talk. A lot of the times that's where stuff gets done, right? Is just having a impromptu conversation with one of your colleagues. And you will find out quite quickly that a lot of the times you're very closely aligned.

You may have different thoughts on how to reach that goal but for the most part, I think most of us have the best of intentions.

Dick DeRyk

Is there a bit of a relationship between the guys from Yorkton?

John Barlow

It's pretty wild that there's three of us in the House of Commons, you know, three out of 343. Pretty amazing, to be honest. We like to share stories. I wouldn't say that we go out of our way to spend time together because when you're here, it is a breakneck pace. Your days are so wild, it's hard to kind of connect. But certainly the fact that there's three of us here is not lost upon us, that's for sure.

Dick DeRyk

You cover one large territory in Alberta. That has got to be time consuming and taking you away from home.

John Barlow

I I don't complain about my travel too much because if I'm driving through the to the riding, I see the Rocky Mountains and you know the Highwood River and pretty beautiful drive wherever I go. And a lot of the times, Dick, there's no cell service, so I actually get a little bit of peace and quiet for a little while, which I don't mind. A lot of history there with some longtime ranch and farm families. And so I don't mind taking a drive to Crowsnest Pass on a Friday afternoon, that's for sure.

This is not easy on family, and you know, if you don't have your family as part of this and completely onside, it's just not gonna work. Louise is as much a part of this as I am, and she likes those drives to Crowsnest Pass and Fort Macleod and Bragg Creek just as much as I do. So it makes for good quality time together on the road, that's for sure.

Dick DeRyk

What did your kids think of it when you went into politics?

John Barlow

Yeah, you know, that's a good question. I don't think I would have done this if my kids were all at home and young. We just had our youngest daughter was still in high school, so the timing wasn't bad. But I'm certainly cognisant of the impact that it had on them as social media became more prominent. I try hard to keep my kids out of it, so to shelter them from that. But you know, they're pretty strong kids and they they've managed this very well. And for my wife and kids who really weren't all that political when I started, that has changed dramatically, I will say that. They are probably as vocal and opinionated or more so than I me.

Dick DeRyk

Brad Redekopp is the elder of the three members of Parliament, born in Yorkton in 1965 and raised here, where his father was an elementary and junior high school principal and a teacher at Yorkton Regional High School. After attending Columbia School, St. Joe's Junior High, and the Regional, he made his way to Saskatoon and the University of Saskatchewan. With a degree in commerce and a CPA designation, he worked in finance and accounting, managed an industrial plant, and for ten years owned and operated a home construction company before trying his hand at politics in 2019 in the riding of Saskatoon West. He is his party shadow minister for immigration, refugees, and citizenship.

Brad Redekopp

I remember back probably around the grade seven, eight age, Mclean's magazine. Mclean's magazine, my family had a subscription to that. And I would read that thing from cover to cover. And as you probably remember, that that was mostly politics in that magazine, is probably the majority of it. So I think you know, reading that from cover to cover every week, you know, I think it just instilled in me an interest, I think, in the broader, you know, what was outside of Yorkton and the national interest and some of those things. And I think that's where my interest and curiosity in politics really got started.

Dick DeRyk

What are your most enduring memories of your years in Yorkton?

Brad Redekopp

Oh, there's a bunch. Shooting gophers in the field behind our house. That was that was always fun. Of course, school was a massive part of my recollection in Yorkton. I have fond memories all the way back to kissing my now wife in the tires out behind Columbia School, getting into sports when I was in junior high at St. Joe's, and then of course getting more seriously into sports when I got to high school at the regional. And so sports is a big part of

my memories there. And just the you know, the camaraderie that I learned, the teamwork that I learned there, that's probably been one of the most significant things I think that's impacted me as a person, particularly in my work career, is the values and the experiences I had on sports teams when I was going to school.

I started with basketball, that was that was kind of my first step was in basketball, particularly in grade eight and grade nine. But once I got to high school, I transitioned more into volleyball. And by the time I was in grade 11, I was only doing volleyball. So that kind of became my specialty. But I enjoyed all sports too. But that volleyball team was a close-knit group. It really was. And you know, I still have some connections with those guys even now. And we learned so much together about what it means to have success, what it means to have failure, you know, how to work as a team. Like I said, that's probably one of the key things that even to this day, the actions that I take and the things that I do, right, even here in Ottawa, are all based on that knowledge of team and how we're stronger together as a team than not.

And it's interesting too, because I can point out people that haven't played team sports just by the way that they interact with us together, you know. So I just can't underestimate the value of being on a team. And it's fun, it's been fun to watch those teammates and how they've you know gone on their lives and had different successes and different experiences.

And another big interest and part of my life when I was in school those years was in band. I played the trombone. I did that from grade six, I think. And actually, one of my earlier memories of that is, I was going to Columbia school, and in those days, band practice at the Regional was at 8:15 in the morning. I think it was Monday, Wednesday, Fridays. My parents would drop me off at the Regional High School. I was in grade six. They drop me off at the high school. I would go down the hallway to the band room and practice in there. And then at, I don't know, nine or nine fifteen when it was over, the school would put me in a taxi and taxi me back to Columbia School. The memory that I have of it specifically is the taxi drivers were always smoking. And I just detested the smell of smoke. And I remember sitting in the back and I would open my window and kind of stick my nose out the window. It didn't matter if it was minus 40 or summertime, and I'd be my nose out the window just trying to breathe as this taxi was driving me back to Columbia School.

But I was in band right up until grade 12 and part of the Marching 100 and part of the jazz band, and so did really enjoy that part of my life as well.

Dick DeRyk

Your wife is from Yorkton?

Brad Redekopp

She actually grew up and was born in Saskatoon, but her family moved to Yorkton when she was in grade three, I believe. We went to the same church, so I'd known her ever since they first came to Yorkton. And so we went to school together. She went to the Sacred Heart for high school, but she was also in band. We dated when I was in grade eight. She dumped me. I always like to remind her of that. And then we dated again, I think, when I was in grade

12, and then we got married a year or two after that. She did write me a literal Dear John letter and said, Yeah, had enough of you.

Dick DeRyk

What was your wife and your and your son's reaction to you getting into politics? Were they politically involved prior to that?

Brad Redekopp

No, I would say no. And the way I got involved in politics was I almost felt like I didn't want to jump into politics without having some level of life experience to build upon. I just didn't think I had anything to offer as an inexperienced person in life. And so you know I went about my life. But in about , I guess 2007, Kelly Block, who is a member of parliament for the Saskatoon area, her and her husband are good friends of my wife and I. And so we'd known them for a long time. And so she decided she wanted to get into politics, and she was looking, as politicians all do, we need volunteers to help us. And you know, where do you start? You start with your friends and family. She came and asked me if I would help her out in in her first campaign, which I did. And that was really my first time I got actively involved in politics, and so I really started to understand and see what it looks like from the inside and the issues that come up.

She eventually got elected to Ottawa here, and so then I you know visited her a few times and just working with her and through a friendship with her, began to understand what it's like. And so that's kind of how it all started.

Dick DeRyk

What's important to you as far as what you want to accomplish?

Brad Redekopp

Yeah, that's a really good question. I think there's sort of a core answer to that, and then there's there is a little bit of that that does change over time with issues as they arise. I've discovered in myself, I think at the core, I'm a person who believes that government shouldn't be overly involved in our lives. And you know, government has a purpose, no question. We need to, you know, have rules, we need to play on the international stage and you know, all those types of things. But at the same time, the government shouldn't be, you know, injecting itself into every aspect of our life. So I would definitely lean towards the smaller government as a better government kind of situation.

And I feel like it was one of the motivators that got me involved at this point in my life because I felt like the government has kind of, to me, crossed the line into where there's just way too much involvement in way too many aspects of our lives. And so that's one kind of fundamental thing.

Related to that is is the whole issue of taxation and the amount of money that governments are taking out of our pockets. And so, you know, I would like to see that to be as minimal as possible, recognizing it needs to be something, but you know, that I think it's become

excessive in the last days, and I think it's just getting worse and worse. And so those are two kind of prime drivers that I've had.

As issues come and go, you know, different things kind of piqued my interest. Right now, I've been on the immigration committee and involved in immigration issues for the last four years, and gotten to know many, many people right across the country, not just in Saskatoon, but right across the country, who are either recent immigrants or long time ago immigrants. I mean, all of us are ultimately immigrants, especially coming from a place like Yorkton, right? We all can trace our heritage back not that far to a newcomer to the country. So, you know, it's really important that we that we maintain a a good immigration system because that's the foundation of our country. So that's actually become something I'm quite passionate about at the moment. I certainly wasn't, I hadn't even much thought of immigration before I got to Ottawa, but it's kind of growing on me.

Dick DeRyk

In Yorkton, as I'm sure in Saskatoon, there's been a bit of an explosion of immigrants coming here.

Brad Redekopp

A lot of those are very entrepreneurial and they are not afraid to take risks, start businesses. You know, and I think that would just relate all the way back to my ancestors who came here to farm. Nothing more entrepreneurial than going to a piece of dirt that has nothing but trees and you know scrub on it and creating a farm out of that. I mean, so so yeah, that that instinct is still there and so vitally important to our country.

Dick DeRyk

What is your approach to politics? If you want to have any influence, I'm sure you gotta talk to the other guys, right?

Brad Redekopp

Yeah, and I mean it always surprises people when you know, when I tell stories about how, you know, we're sitting in a restaurant or having a drink or whatever with members of the other party. And people in today's context, they're like, oh my goodness, you know, I can't imagine how you could possibly have a conversation.

Well, you know, most politicians, we all have our partisan views for sure. Most politicians are still just normal people. And I always tell this to constituents, especially when we disagree on things, is that I want to have the conversation. I want to hear your perspective because when I speak with somebody who believes something different than I do, I always learn something. And I would hope that that person does too. And it doesn't necessarily mean that I'm convinced to change my mind, but you know, often, often with that little bit of insight, you know, maybe I just see things slightly differently, you know, and so I think that's really important. And I think that's actually lost in in much of much of our political discourse today is the ability to have those conversations with people that we don't agree with.

In Ottawa, there's a lot of overlap, you know, like you have Liberals who would lean to a point where they might overlap with some of our Conservatives that lean a little bit the other way. So people aren't as different as you might think. You get labeled because you're a Liberal or you're a Conservative, but that doesn't necessarily mean that your views are diametrically opposed. You know, they could be, but they could also be very similar. But you know, you can have conversations with people as long as people are reasonable. All parties. There are those people who are just radical partisans, and but those are rare. I think it's important to have those conversations, important to maintain those relationships. It helps us to make better decisions.

Dick DeRyk

The Bailey name was and still is well known in Yorkton. Among many other activities, Allan Bailey and his wife Colleen owned and operated Bailey Funeral Home. Allan was an alderman and then mayor of the city in the 1960s and 70s, and Colleen was the founding CEO of NorthEastern Cablevision when cable television came to Yorkton in the nineteen eighties.

Burton Bailey, a resident of Red Deer for almost twenty-five years now, was the middle child in the Bailey family and is the rookie among the three members of Parliament we talked to, having been elected in the spring of 2025. His path there took him through the University of Winnipeg, business school in Lloydminster, funeral home apprenticeship in Saskatoon, funeral home management in Winnipeg and Surrey, British Columbia, and a year and a half in San Francisco, where his wife Kirsten was studying to become a doctor, specializing in reconstructive and cosmetic surgery, which she still practices in Red Deer. She, by the way, is the daughter of a legend in local York and television, Linus Westberg and his wife Ellen, who also live in Red Deer.

After arriving in Red Deer, Burton was involved in a company that worked in construction in the oil fields, before taking on the job of executive assistant to the local MLA, who also served and still serves in the Alberta cabinet.

Dick DeRyk

Burton, you come from a family that has certainly been very community-minded and involved. Your dad was a mayor in Yorkton. your mother was very active in in arts and cultural organizations, province-wide and and Canada-wide. Did that have any influence on you?

Burton Bailey

Certainly it did. I knew the commitment that you had to make. And I often think of my mom Colleen, how at the age of 20 she got me involved with the Arthritis Society on their Saskatchewan board. And after I did that first board, I continued to serve on boards when I was in Winnipeg with the hospice and palliative care and Rotary. So, yes, without a doubt, my parents were a big influence on my community-minded involvement.

Dick DeRyk

I don't remember them as being active in political parties. The mayor's job in Yorkton is non-political as far as affiliation with parties.

Burton Bailey

My family, I think anybody in municipal politics kind of goes with the flavor of the day. So Allan and Colleen would have gone through many waves over their years, whether it be with the New Democrat Party or the Conservative party. I even remember Pierre Elliott Trudeau coming to our house in his big beaver skin coat. I'll leave it at that. I remember Pierre being at our house. Don't tell anybody.

Dick DeRyk

I remember Robert Stanfield coming into the office of the Yorkton Enterprise. It would have been 1968, I would think. And the first thing that struck me was how short he was. You know, because you see pictures, and they all look tall in a photograph, right? I always thought he was a tall, skinny guy. Well, he was a short, skinny guy.

You got involved in working with an MLA in Red Deer seven, eight years ago. Was that your first introduction to party politics?

Burton Bailey

Very much so. I'm very active in our Catholic church. I sat on the parish council and the archbishop's council. Adriana LaGrange was the past chair, and we were assembling a playground together at a school that my children went to. And she said, you know, Burton, I've decided I'm going to run for the UCP party. And I said, Wow, is that ever interesting. I said, well, if you need any help, make sure you phone me. And that's how it all started. The next week I met with 12 ladies. I was the only gentleman there, and they said, we need to have a man as the campaign manager. And I said, well, I've never done it, but I'm up for the challenge.

We really did well. We had a great campaign, so good that the federal MP for the area said, hey, would you run my campaign? So in my first year, I ran two political campaigns. And then it just was a continual thing. I kept on running campaigns. As soon as Adriana LaGrange won that first election, she asked me to be her executive assistant, which I accepted. And every time an election would roll around, I would take a leave of absence for a few months and go and run that campaign and became extremely good at it. Organizing boards, raising money, all the things that require to run a campaign.

Dick DeRyk

That's behind the scenes, or certainly more behind the scenes. That's quite a change to being the guy out front.

Burton Bailey

Absolutely. It's very humbling, but it shows you how people recognize work and it shows you that anything's possible. You know, never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I would have the opportunity to become an MP. I always felt that I would be the second person

behind these figures, whether it be Adriana, whether it be Blaine, and always enjoyed it, didn't expect anything more. But the opportunity presented itself when I ran. The support that I received from all the members of the Conservative Party in my area was overwhelming.

Dick DeRyk

One very notable and noticed community project Burton was involved in while working for the MLA was incredibly successful. He and others assisted and resettled a large number of Ukrainian refugees in Red Deer. Burton explains.

Burton Bailey

And one of our local Ukrainian delis was accepting donations and food and clothing and sending it off to Ukraine. And so I basically introduced this family from Viva Delhi to the premier. And the premier said, Well, I have some connections with WestJet, and we'll see if we can help you in shipping all this stuff that you've been collecting. We formed a committee because I told this lady, you can't be taking donations and not giving out tax receipts. So we involved the Ukrainian Catholic Church and they were issuing the tax receipts. I went out and started raising money, and I raised \$300,000 in about six months. And with that money, we started buying plane tickets. So anybody that had loved ones in Red Deer, we would buy your plane tickets so you could reunite with them. And we bought 125 plane tickets. In the end, 1,250 people moved to Red Deer during the war, and our committee helped them. But yeah, it was a very difficult couple of years. I found that all I was doing was dealing with issues from the war, but it matched my job with the MLA. So she was very supportive. And for all of my efforts, I was fortunate to receive the King's Jubilee Medal. And now I've hired one of the ladies that was working with me as my full-time immigration person. I'm still dealing with all these people that I helped get here.

Dick DeRyk

And that resonates in Yorkton as well, because there's a Ukrainian population here, as you'll remember.

Burton Bailey

All of my friends, you know, we all celebrated two Christmases. We all had connections, whether it be Orthodox or Ukrainian Catholic. But yes, it was so nice to see the communities come together. We had about five churches that were involved in this committee, and my main role was actually just fundraising. And I got creative. I had Chantal Kreviazuk come out, and we did a concert, and that raised about \$80,000 in itself. There were some very generous people in Red Deer that had Ukrainian ties, wanted to help out.

Dick DeRyk

Back to the present. What's your style when it comes to doing politics?

Burton Bailey

I always maintain doing the right thing. I'm a bit of a follower, , but I'm also learning a lot. Just yesterday, it was temporary foreign workers. I was meeting with farmers, meeting with um greenhouses, and trying to get a handle on the need for temporary foreign workers in my riding. And what I'm saying is it's a constant learning curve for me. I'm not by any means a

seasoned politician like some of my colleagues. I rely on them and I'm not scared to ask for help. I've got a great staff. That's one thing I learned from Adriana is get the best. And she thought that I was the best. So when I became MP, I knew that I wanted strong people, both in Ottawa and in Red Deer. And I found the right people, took a bit of a different approach. A lot of people don't spend a lot of money on staff, but I took a different approach and wanted to have really good people supporting me.

Dick DeRyk

Personally, what are your priorities in relation to the needs of the riding?

Burton Bailey

Healthcare has been something that I've been always actively involved in here in Red Deer. And over the past 10 years, I've been advocating for this hospital expansion, working alongside with Adriana. The bottom line is we started with a \$3 million hospital expansion that's now \$1.8 billion and will be Alberta Health's largest project. I've taken that to Ottawa and I've learned a lot about healthcare over the years, how it's changing some of the problems that we have in recruiting in rural Alberta. Our WIP asked me to join the health committee for the opposition. So I'm really excited. The other thing that I'm very passionate about is housing. There's so many different types of housing, but Red Deer is lacking in transitional and affordable housing, really working hard on trying to champion a few projects, building bridges for some of the nonprofits so that they can actually become their own landlords.

Dick DeRyk

What's the family think about all of this?

Burton Bailey

Well, they're very supportive. They were supportive right from the get-go. My littlest daughter was out door knocking with me. Um, they're really, really supportive. But yes, there's going to be some changes. We're relying on friends and family to fill some of the gaps with me being away. There will be some changes, that's for sure.

Dick DeRyk

The name Searle Turton is likely less well known to York and residents of the eighties and nineties. He was the son of a working family that moved to Yorkton in 1984 when he was five years old, having been born in Regina and having then lived in Coronach before the family moved here, a move brought about by his father's employment. Searle attended St. Alphonse's and St. Mary's Elementary Schools and Sacred Heart High School. The Turtons left here when Searle was sixteen, but as he tells us, his formative years here had a major influence on his later life. He worked in technology sales, setting up document control systems for clients, and before that was a dual-ticket tradesman in the construction industry. He was also a three-term counselor for Spruce Grove from 2010 to 2019, before being first elected as MLA. He was appointed to the Alberta government cabinet in 2023, where he is the Minister of Children and Family Services.

Searle Turton

And to be honest, I can't even really remember what those petitions were, but I remember my parents were always passionate about politics. And a close family friend was Lauren McLaren, who was the former MLA for that area. And he was a very close family friend. And I remember I caught my very first fish at his cabin at Fort Capel. And so I was always awed and inspired by politics. And an old classmates' dad was Clay Serby as well. So it always seemed like as if these people I knew were always surrounded by politics. Always had an interest in it growing up.

Dick DeRyk

What are some of your memories of Yorkton during those formative years?

Searle Turton

Oh, so we used to live right behind the old Canadian tyre that was on the west side of Yorkton. I remember bike rides between our house on Dalewood Crescent, riding my bike all the way to Sacred Heart High School, the old site. But even when we lived on the other side of town, I remember visiting the mall, being a six and seven-year-old on fence in Crescent, shopping. I always loved reading. And so going to the library, going to the bookstore, buying books, having my own lawnmower business when I was 10, 11 years old, and traveling to every part of Yorkton at that time, mowing lawns. I mean, it was a great community to grow up. I remember driving past there just a couple years ago and seeing how much it was developed by fencing crest. And when I was a little guy, I remember those fourplexes were the edge of town and there was just a big field, and now it's just solid houses all through there. So it's amazing to see how much Yorkton has changed over the last 30 years or so.

Dick DeRyk

What got you interested? You were on city council. What got you interested in provincial politics?

Searle Turton

Well, I always had an interest in higher levels of government, but you know, really for me it was just the motivation for change. I know that there was a current government in Alberta from 2015 and 19. I differed um greatly in the values that they were talking about and thought it was a chance and opportunity for me to represent a place where I call a home now, which is Spruce Grove, and make that transition from city council to provincial politics. So it's um it's different than municipal government. You're definitely much more removed from the day-to-day operations of a community, but you also get to serve at a higher level, which is what I really appreciate and kind of represent the 64,000 people in my riding at the provincial legislature. When I was first elected in 2019, I had a one-on-one with Premier Kenny, and he said, So, Turton, why are you here? And I remember telling him, I said at that moment, I said, You know, Premier, just to let you know, adoption is very near and dear to my heart. My wife and I, we adopted our youngest son, and I said, at the very first opportunity, I'm gonna do my best. I don't know what that looks like, but somehow make adoption easier for families.

And I remember about three weeks later, a call and I said, just to let you know, , you've been drawn first for a private members motion. And I'm like, great, what's a motion? Because again, you're just trying to figure out the process of what this is. And so I was able to put in the very first motion in 2019 as a private members, and which I urged the Alberta government to make adoption easier and more affordable for families. And to me, that was a real special moment because I went through that process trying to provide a forever home for a child, and then being able to make it easier for families throughout the entire province to be able to adopt kids was pretty near and dear to my heart, which is interesting now that as the Minister of Children Family Services, adoption is part of my portfolio. It's a lot of responsibility, and it's interesting kind of looking at it through the lens of trying to expand our own family 13, 14 years ago, not lost on me, how I've come full circle in that regard.

Dick DeRyk

What was your family's reaction when you decided to get into provincial politics?

Searle Turton

I was very thankful that my wife and kids and immediate family have supported me in this transition. The one thing that I appreciate is that when I leave my home here in Spruce Grove, when I drive to the Legislature, it's about a 28-minute drive. I can go do my work downtown. I can come home. Some of my colleagues, just like they are in Saskatchewan, they might have like a five, six hour drive to go home. For myself, I didn't have that big travel and onerous travel commitment. Thankful that they supported me. I think they always realized that I would be moving up in the world. And um, you know, I would be here if it wasn't for their support.

Dick DeRyk

What is your style of politics?

Searle Turton

I've always been a relationship guy. I mean, I was in the private sector and sales, and I always had a reputation for building bridges, either with clients and when I was on city council, I always had the reputation of being able to work with whoever I needed to to kind of get the job done. I bring that same style to the legislature. So while I do seem to be getting more divisive, my motion that I mentioned about adoption, as well as the secondary motion that I did for enhanced recycling here in the province of Alberta, were two of the few motions that were actually supported unanimously by all members of the House, by the opposition as well as the government. And I think that really speaks to my own style when it comes to dealing with people and treating people with respect. I realize that, you know, as an elected official in this area, not everybody voted for me. But my hope is that long after I'm gone, they can come to me and say, you know, Searle, we didn't vote for you, but you represented us well. And we were never embarrassed about you. You're always open and responsive. That's the kind of flavor I want to bring to provincial politics and one that I hope that will spread to many other of my legislative colleagues.

Maybe in past generations, you would base your opinion about someone from a face-to-face conversation, and we had the ability to have a constructive dialogue from differing

sides of equation and still to be respectful. But now, to be honest, I think social media plays a pretty big part of it in terms of placing it into an us versus them. The algorithms kick in where it only gives you validation statements and posts. We have lost the ability to have constructive dialogue with those that think differently than us. And I think that's unfortunate. And until I think something changes with how we treat social media and caricatures of elected officials, , I'm I'm not sure how it can be improved, to be honest, which I think is quite unfortunate.

Dick DeRyk

One final thing. You were involved in union work when you were a tradesman. So here you are as a conservative. In Saskatchewan, union and conservative have never been synonymous.

Searle Turton

In my early 20s, you know, I wanted to pick up a trade, and so I became a German carpenter and scaffolder and joined the carpenters union at that time because industrial work tended to go unionized. And during my time as a tradesman, I decided to serve in higher capacity. So I was actually elected. And I again I think it highlights the bridge builder flavor that I tend to bring, where you know, as a conservative, I support resource development for a prosperous province and trade unions and construction unions, they tend to be the ones that build the refineries, build the upgraders, build the pipelines, and so there's a lot of synergies between those two worlds. And so last term when I was a private member, Premier Kenny actually appointed me as the private sector union liaison working with Minister Copping because he knew I had connections and experience working within a unionized environment. I've done a little bit of everything, it does make me a little bit of an enigma. Some people aren't quite sure where I stand, but I I do enjoy having those conversations and just kind of saying, look, we're a lot more similar than you may think. And again, if all you do is believe the Facebook algorithms, I try to be that open voice of reason, of bridge building, and congeniality that I think has resonated with many members of the legislature.

Dick DeRyk

Now eight years into retirement from active politics is Dave Rodney. He was first elected in 2004 in Calgary Lougheed as a member of the Alberta legislature and served for thirteen years, including a stint as Minister of Wellness, a brand new portfolio in Alberta's government, before stepping down in 2017 to allow Jason Kenny, the leader of the new United Conservative Party, to run in the safe seat. His name may be more familiar to York and people, though, for a different reason than his political career in Alberta. Dave was the first from Saskatchewan to make it to the top of Mount Everest, a feat accomplished in 1999. Two years later, he reached the summit again, the first Canadian to ascent Everest twice. In recognition of that, a green space with a very steep hill, long used for short ski runs and fast tobogganing, located south of the city water tower was named Rodney Ridge in his honor.

Dave was born in Mankota, Saskatchewan, but the family moved to Yorkton soon after, where his father was a teacher and his mother worked at the hospital. After high school, he left for university, where he received Bachelor of Arts and Education degrees. That was

followed by 13 years as an educator and administrator in Canada, Nepal, and the West Indies, then as a placement officer with Employment and Immigration Canada. In 1997, he established an enterprise called Spirit Quest, taking on a career in motivational and keynote speaking, facilitation of workshops, guiding worldwide adventures, and working with such notable names as National Geographic, the BBC, and Oprah Winfrey to produce more than 20 books and documentaries.

Dave Rodney

For so many reasons, I fondly recall my time at St. Paul's Elementary, where we got out to a whole lot of no good, my friends and I. But one of the good things that we did was participate in participation. And I can tell you that with the staff that they had there, with the programs for Phys Ed and all the rest, I know that that was one area where I learned a whole lot about never giving up. I can remember doing the flexed arm hang for well over two minutes just so I could get that excellence badge. And I still got it big. You know, I was introduced to skiing by a teacher there, and that literally changed my life to Alpine Adventures, you know. And if I can just mention the other two schools that I went to, St. Joe's Junior High. Well, that was where I was introduced to public speaking, believe it or not. I was asked to do a speech on a very controversial topic to a Catholic and public junior high. And I'll tell you, I wouldn't trade my time at Sacred Heart High School for anything in great part, because my dad was my teacher of five subjects. And during my youth, he coached me in five different sports. You know, he taught me a whole lot about being on the field or on the rank or on the diamond or wherever it happened to be. But I also got introduced into whatever club there was, I was definitely part of it.

But I'll share one memory with you, and I can't remember what grade it was in for sure. But there's a certain election in Saskatchewan that went a certain way, and I really had a problem with the results because it seemed to me a lot of voters either didn't know what they were voting on, or they voted simply from their gut, or perhaps for more selfish motivations than anything. And so when the teacher was pretty tired and didn't want to teach and said it's creative writing time, write on whatever you want. I wrote this essay firmly, tongue in cheek, all of the reasons why not all people should be allowed to vote. Now, now between you and me and the audience, of course everyone has to be allowed to vote as a democracy. But I would hope that before people mark their X, they would be conscious and conscientious. They would find out who is running, what they stand for, see them in a forum or debate, maybe even a conversation with them. If they did, then my goodness, I think we wouldn't have big surprises on election day, like we sometimes do municipally, provincially, or federally.

Dick DeRyk

What in particular, if anything, during your youth in Yorkton piqued your interest in politics?

Dave Rodney

I have one firm memory that would answer your question directly, and that was a certain social studies class where it just popped into my head. I realized that what do you call it, politics or government or public service or elected office, when done well, can be and should be one of the greatest agents of social change available to human beings. And I

thought to myself, if and when I have the experience and the expertise, I owe it to give back. So that came out of not daydreaming but strategizing during social studies class in in Yorkton. And if I can give you a couple more snapshots, though, after the second Everest summit, I firmly remember not having slept on a bed for over two months. I just I slept on rocks and ice on Everest.

And so for me to walk into a hotel room and see, even though it was only a two and a half inch yucky foam mattress and Cat Man Doo, I thought, wow, I actually get to sleep on this thing. I was about to at least sit down on it, and the phone rang, and it was actually the Calgary Herald. And they said, Hey, congrats on being the first Canadian to climb out Everest twice. But we were really calling because we know we have way more on your resume as a person, and we're wondering if you'd run as the mayor of Calgary. And I said, Hang on for a second, his worship is still in the chair. And of course, I hadn't seen society in in two months, and we didn't have the internet that we have today. And they said, no, no, he he retired. he's not running again. And I used a bit of a euphemism. I said, you know, you don't start climbing a mountain from the top. So if I was going to run, you know, I'd consider perhaps a different position than mayor. So when I was called to attend a future summit, which was actually apolitical, like what should we plan for our future for our province? That kind of kicked things off. And I realized, okay, I can't whine and complain about problems. Let's find solutions to things, let's help out and let's give back.

Dick DeRyk

You were elected four times. What really drove you that you're looking back on and are proud of?

Dave Rodney

Categories for me, sir, would include the work with individual constituents. I can tell you that often there were folks of any age and any stage and any walk of life, any culture, who came into the office and they'd be in tears about a problem with their kids or at work or their parents, or and sometimes they were ready to shoot the premier. But I found it so satisfying in working with them to find answers to whatever the problems were. But I always tried to make sure that they had a hand in it. Sure, I'd pick up the phone and call another minister or whatever needed to be done if and when appropriate. But I thought, how do we help them with these skills and attitudes and actions so that they can be more affirmed and confident in taking care of things like this in the future?

Another would have been the agencies, boards, and commissions that I worked on. A researcher looked it up and he said, in your four terms, you worked on over 60. Now we're not just helping individuals, we're taking care of all kinds of groups. So that's yet another facet. A third one, I was the chair of the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. And I really didn't have a whole lot of experience in that realm at all. But the premier really believed in me. He thought, here's a guy who has proven that he lives a kind of a clean, living, hardworking life. And I was only there for a couple of years, but when I rolled up my sleeves, I went right into the facilities where there was education and prevention programs and treatment going on, and really wanted to learn everything I could so I could help those folks

who were at the very bottom of their existence. And to see some of those folks really succeed was absolutely a blessing.

I also served as the last house leader in the legislature for the Progressive Conservative Party before it went away. I saved this last one because it was my favorite. I was in cabinet, not in health, but in wellness. I'm the one and only wellness minister our province ever had. And I can give it to you this way: it was all about positive, proactive, preventative programs for people of all ages, from students to seniors, people in the workplace. It was about keeping people happy, healthy, and out of the hospital as much as possible. It really came down to increasing quality of life while decreasing health care costs. And sadly, as the election cycle goes through, these kinds of things, in the minds of so many, are actually nice to have and they're not critical compared to say doctor strikes or issues with a nursing union. I do lament the fact that that did not last longer because I really have always thought that if we can do those things, like be happy, healthy, other than the hospital a lot longer, not only are we enjoying our life personally, but professionally it's helpful as well. And it's just to me, it's the right thing to do. I can thank my time in Yorkton for the attitudes and actions that I brought to the legislature. I just thought you attract a lot more with honey than you do with a big club. And at the same time, you don't sell yourself out and overpromise, under deliver, pretend that you're something that you're not. But you won't be surprised that I really enjoyed finding common ground whenever it was possible. I didn't care if somebody was kind of left wing, right wing, or up the middle. For me, I'd walk with folks between the buildings and we talk about real life. I mean, whichever party they were from, they really wanted to help create a better province. I tried to concentrate on the things that we had in common.

It was my last term when for the one and only time I was in opposition. And I was the longest serving person in my party at the time. And the guy said, Well, Dave, because of that fact, you get to be, you get to choose the ministries that you want to be a critic of. I said, I don't want to be a critic. Then you could be the shadow minister. They said, Well, I said, that sounds creepy to me. Well, there's those two terms, critic or shadow minister. Who opposes? You're in opposition. I said, I don't like any of those terms. Why don't we see if we can change the turn to advocate?

And so even in opposition, I was just advocating. How do we work with this new government? Because people would say, well, we hate them. Well, no, they're the government. And not only do we have to, but we get to work with them, and maybe we can help them. I just thought we've got to make a clear stand every time that's appropriate. We can't be wishy-washy. We can't have one set of values, and if you don't like it, well, here's my other set.

When I did say goodbye, when I stepped aside, it was said at the news conference by the person who became the next premier. He said, Dave Rodney's very unusual. I've never seen this in all my years in politics. He's leaving here without enemies, even though he was elected four times. I lament the fact that things have become so divisive just about everywhere now.

I really wonder who would even want to be an elected representative now. It's either somebody where it's their best job ever, or they genuinely believe they can make a difference. And I hope and I trust that that still is the case, that people are willing to put up with everything that comes with the job now.

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