AN INTERVIEW WITH LORNE CALVERT

Premier of Saskatchewan



1) What do you remember from your schooling in history and how were you affected by it?

The history teachers I had in elementary, high school and college who had a love of history infected their students with a similar love and understanding that history shapes and informs our future.

2) What is the event or personality in Canadian history that most inspired you or your favourite history book?

I was most inspired by the Medicare battle of 1962 and then-Premier of Saskatchewan, Woodrow Lloyd.

Clearly, our publicly funded health care system has transformed not only Saskatchewan, but the entire country. Truly, it has become one of Canada's defining characteristics. While today we take it for granted, the idea of Medicare was far from universally popular in 1962.

As Premier, Woodrow Lloyd was tasked to lead the province through a period of tremendous turmoil, and he did so with great courage and conviction in the face of vigorous opposition from physicians in the province, and others. There's a well-known story about Lloyd giving a speech in front of hundreds of booing, anti-Medicare doctors in Regina in 1962, which is something few politicians have ever had to experience. There are stories about his children being threatened and his home vandalized. And of course there was the province-wide physicians' strike. All this would have tested the mettle of any politician, and the fact that Lloyd didn't back down speaks volumes about his character and the strength of his convictions.

History has proven that Lloyd was right. Medicare was the right thing for Canada. Lloyd's story should serve as an example to anyone who aspires to a career in elected office that the most controversial issues are often the ones most worth fighting for.

3) What do you think about the idea of a national curriculum or national history standards?

In Canada, education is under provincial jurisdiction and this structure, by and large, has served the provinces well.

Saskatchewan has participated and is participating in a number of national and regional initiatives. These are: the pan-Canadian Science framework (completed); and, the development of resources for French first language teachers in linguistic minority contexts. Common frameworks have been developed, or are currently being created, for French (first and second language), English, Science, Mathematics, and Social Studies (K-9) through the Western and Northern Canadian Protocol. To pursue a national history curriculum (9-12) or national history standards would require the agreement of all provinces and territories.

4) What kind of balance should there be between provincial and national history? Between Canadian history and world history?

A thorough study of the relationships that exist between local and larger perspectives is very important when studying history. Understanding how communities work together within the provincial context and how provinces function within the national perspective is vital. It is equally important to understand how Canada fits into the larger global context.

Various skills are required to achieve this. The ability to understand issues and/or events, to critically analyze perspectives, and to think creatively is essential.

5) Given the reality that we forget most of what we are taught in school, what ideally should students carry away from their history classes?

The knowledge, skills, and values developed in social studies help students to know and appreciate

the past, to understand the present, and to influence the future. When studying history or other subjects, common skills are intended to be interwoven into the learning, thereby enhancing the process. In Saskatchewan curricula, these common skills have been grouped into six categories: Communication; Critical and Creative thinking; Independent Learning; Personal and Social Development; Numeracy; and, Technological literacy. Students may apply these skills to any situation they encounter within or beyond the school setting.

Therefore, social studies in the school setting has a unique responsibility for providing students with the opportunity to acquire knowledge, skills and values in order to function affectively within their local community and national society as part of an interdependent world.

6) What do think are the advantages of knowledge of Canadian history in future career pursuits?

Knowledge of Canadian history combined with the necessary skills and values required to understand the Canadian context serve as a solid foundation for effective participation in pluralistic societies whether it is at the local, national or international level.

7) Are there areas of history that you think we should be paying more attention to?

While it is important to have solid content, it may be more important to establish an emotional connection with the past. This emotional link facilitates our understanding of our ancestors' spiritual, social, and cultural challenges. In the past, all peoples shared dreams and fears: they hoped for their children's safety and worked together toward a future of promise.

Every day, and particularly during this, our Centennial Year, we are reminded of the rich multi-cultural make-up of our province and the hard work and accomplishments of the people who have preceded us. Knowing the challenges faced, and the decisions made, by people who came from many parts of the globe, facilitates our understanding of the evolution of our vibrant communities.

When perspective is linked with decision making, emotion often surfaces. Students who learn to identify past perspectives in order to make a decision are drawn into the drama of human life. Enhancing our emotional connection to history must not be overlooked.

8) Do you think that strong citizenship requires knowledge of the country's history?

Yes, strong citizenship does require knowledge of the country's history. Knowledge of the past, with its incredible challenges, glorious achievements, and unfortunate tragic events, grounds one for functioning effectively within local and national communities. A strong understanding of the forces that shaped the past can provide guiding principles when looking to shape the future.

