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## Now, it's called 'Saskatcha-win'

### While Alberta's Tories spend us into the ground, our neighbours flourish

By **KERRY DIOTTE**

A decade ago, a close friend of mine decided to move from Edmonton, and I knew I'd miss him.

My pal, John Gormley, had been practising law in town and seemed on a fast-track to become a partner in his firm.

Out of the blue, he was offered a job to do a province-wide radio talk show at News Talk 650 CKOM in Saskatoon, Sask.

He'd begun a radio career there way back in 1977 before being elected in 1984 for one term at age 27 as a Tory member of Parliament.

After losing his seat, he went to law school and wound up in Edmonton.

Besides being affable and funny, Gormley is one of the brightest people I know, especially about politics or current events. His talk radio show is the best in Canada.

Gormley's a smart cookie - and that's exactly why I was taken aback in 1998 when he decided to quit working as an Edmonton lawyer and move back to his home province of Saskatchewan.

While I wished him well and knew he'd succeed, I thought to myself: "Saskatchewan? Oh, my God! Why leave a bigger, more prosperous city and province to go to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan?"

I admit it. Like a lot of people, I looked down on that province that was often the butt of jokes. I'm not even sure why I looked down on it. The people are friendly and rock solid. Saskatoon is attractive.

It's just that the province is so sparsely populated, so small-town, so cold and so very, very flat.

Besides, it'd long been a hotbed of socialism, which pretty much guaranteed it would never boom.

But that was then and this is now. Saskatchewanians are getting the last laugh.

Since 2006 it's been a "have" province driven by rich resources, including oil and gas, uranium and potash.

This week, Saskatchewan Party Premier Brad Wall announced an unbudgeted surplus projected at \$3 billion - at a time when once-rich Ontario will run a deficit.

The business-friendly Saskatchewan Party, first elected last fall, announced the largest personal income tax cuts in the province's history. People with household incomes of \$40,000 or less won't pay a cent in provincial income tax.

Those earning around \$50,000 will see their income taxes cut 60%.

"A working family with two children can now earn up to \$41,300 before they start to pay any provincial income tax," Wall crowed. "That's the highest level of any province and it's one more reason Saskatchewan is the best place in Canada to earn a living and build a life."

Albertans have long joked that, when driving to Saskatchewan you could always tell when you'd crossed the border: the roads were terrible. But Wall is doing something about that, too.

Besides slashing taxes like some political version of Freddy Krueger, they're boosting infrastructure spending more than 50% to \$1.5 billion - and the government will maintain a \$2-billion rainy day fund.

The one-time have-not province will lead the nation in economic growth, stealing bragging rights previously held by Alberta. Indeed, Saskatchewan is the only province that's predicted to have a higher economic growth rate this year than last.

It still can't beat the tax rates in Alberta, but it's getting closer - and the way Alberta's Tories spend money, Saskatchewanians might have the last laugh on that front too. (Alberta spends more money per capita than any province. Between 2003 and 2008 it has increased spending by 71%, to \$37 billion dollars annually.)

Gormley, for one, has reason to gloat: "It's taken years of hard work but everything's different now - attitude, people's optimism and knowing we deserve to be No 1. Things have changed so much here that Alberta now has more NDP MPs than Saskatchewan does!"

If nothing else, we won't be hearing nearly as many Saskatchewan jokes.