Interview with Mr. Wab Kinew*

BRYAN P. SCHWARTZ, DARCY L. MACPHERSON

Bryan P. Scwartz, K.C. (BPS): No one runs with intentions of becoming leader of the official opposition, everyone runs with the ultimate intention of becoming Premier of course. Many, many Premiers have gone through the preliminary step of being leader of the opposition. Doing the job [of Premier], in many contexts, is very different from what it looks like from the outside. So, is there anything that surprised you about actually being the leader of a party, as opposed to being a caucus member?

Wab Kinew (WK): I don't know about surprises, but what I would say is that I have learned a ton. It has been a phenomenal learning opportunity, and across every dimension of what the job entails I feel like a more capable leader. You have many dimensions to the job: The speaking to the public side of the job, the running of a caucus team, and legislative team side of the job. You have a running of the staff operation side of the job, running the [New Democratic] party side of the job. Then you have the actual electoral and political strategizing responsibilities. And then, of course, there's public policy, the moral dimensions of it. So, it is really a multifaceted job that, across every dimension I've had the opportunity to

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* Interview of Wabanakwut "Wab" Kinew was conducted by Dr. Bryan Schwartz, Darcy MacPherson and Selene Sharpe on May 29, 2023.

Premier Wab Kinew is the 25th premier of Manitoba. Kinew was first elected as the MLA for Fort Rouge in 2016 and was elected party leader and leader of the official opposition in 2017. He is the son of Dr. Tobasonakwut Kinew and Dr. Kathi Kinew and is from the Onigaming First Nation in northwestern Ontario. Before becoming an MLA, Kinew worked as a broadcaster and as an administrator at the University of Winnipeg. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in economics from the University of Manitoba and a master's degree in Indigenous governance. Kinew is an honorary witness of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a bestselling author. He is a caring dad to three boys and a devoted husband to his wife Lisa, who is a doctor.

improve quite a bit [laughing]. I don't know if this counts as me being surprised about what the job entails. More so, it's one of those things that you don't really understand until you get a chance to do it. Once you have a chance to do it, you understand what it actually takes to accomplish those various functions.

BPS: Is it tough to go from the colleague to being the boss? I am remembering Jean Chretien[61] becoming Prime Minister, and on his first day in office he said to everybody, "I know we have been friends and in the trenches together all these years, but now I am the Prime Minister, and you are not." It was basically putting aside all loyalty and friendships, "somebody has to make the hard calls, I am the boss now." I think in many environments that is difficult, going from being one of the co-workers, to becoming the boss. I know in academic environments we see this a lot. A co-worker will go from being a colleague to becoming the Dean [of a faculty], and it is very difficult sometimes to adjust your role from working side-by-side with people for twenty years, to transitioning into a position of power. Was that a difficult, problematic challenge for you?

WK: I only became a partisan at the start of 2016. I became the leader of the NDP[62] in 2017, so most of my political career has been in the role that I am currently in. I think the learning curve was very steep as a new candidate at the start of 2016, even steeper to become a newly elected MLA,[63] and the learning curve only increased from there to becoming the leader of one of the major parties here in Manitoba. So, there has definitely been a lot to learn along the way and managing the relationships with my colleagues and peers has been one of the important priorities. One of the decisions that I made is I wanted to run our caucus like an actual team. To have it centered around the ethos of collaboration and sharing information and listening to different viewpoints. I think I got a lot of great support and advice, including from people who ran political organizations who were perhaps a little bit more centralized than we chose to run ours. I've taken

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61 Jean Chretien is a Canadian lawyer and politician who served as the 20th Prime Minister of Canada from 1993 to 2003.

62 Manitoba New Democratic Party.

63 Member of the Legislative Assembly. In 2016, Wab Kinew won his NDP seat for Fort Rouge, defeating Rana Bokhari with 37% of the vote.

this advice seriously, and I've acted on the advice, but also, I think, particularly being the leader of a progressive political party, the politics of today require collaboration and a democratic approach, because that's just where progressive people are at. They want representation in their politics, they want responsiveness from leaders, so I've tried to live up to those principles in the role.

BPS: To some extent, I think swimming against a long tide of history in Canada, which is, First Ministers have become more presidential, cabinet ministers historically, it does not matter party structure, generally speaking, has become not really co-equal so much. It has become pretty much taking orders from the Premier, the First Minister, the First Minister's staff. So, the official theory on the books about cabinet governance and so on, I think de facto we tend to think more towards a centralized executive branch. You've mentioned that is not the direction you want to head down. One view of opposition theory is that the official opposition is the government in waiting. You should criticize, you should have an alternate plan. The other theory is that you are holding the government to account. You can criticize without necessarily saying, "this is what we would do in charge this costs too much, etc..." It's a critical role, but you don't always have to present alternatives. Mr. Poilievre,[64] for example, recently gave a speech in which he said, "yeah I know that people criticize me, but we will present our alternative plan during the campaign, right now our job as opposition is to oppose, criticize, and challenge." Do you have any views on that spectrum in terms of being the alternative government versus being the critic in chief in terms of what a modern opposition party should be doing?

WK: I think it is a balance of both. Maybe I can answer the question in a roundabout way. As the leader of the opposition, I work out of the same office utilized by the last few [opposition leaders], going back to at least

[64] Pierre Poilievre: Pierre Poilievre is Canadian politician who served as leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, and leader of the Official Opposition in Canada since 2022. Poilievre has served as a Member of Parliament (MP) since 2004.

Pallister,[65] maybe also McFadyen.[66] It is one of the few rooms in the building that is shaped like a complete circle. It is an architectural oddity. So, we asked Frank Albo,[67] who you probably know does the Hermetic Code tours, where he offers a very entertaining and engaging take on the history and symbolism of the building. We asked him about this room, this circular office, "what do you make of that?" His response was to think of [the office] as a drum. It's a circular room, with an echo so you can amplify the voices of the people. The reason why I thought that was relevant to your question is because, do you think the role of the leader of the opposition is to bring forward the voices of the people of Manitoba? I think a lot of the time it's about holding the current government to account. During the COVID period,[68] we really had a lot of material to work with in terms of people being frustrated, people being concerned, not least of all because the COVID era was a time in which the provincial government had great power over people's lives that is rarely matched during other times in Manitoba's history. Necessarily, with greater government involvement in your life, there should be greater accountability. So, we as the opposition really had an important role to play. We had so many people reaching out to us, we had many different public policy issues to be bringing forward. That said, I think the people of Manitoba, in addition to providing a voice for them, the people of Manitoba also want solutions to be brought forward. For instance, one idea that we have been advocating for over the past number of years is a province-wide nutrition program in schools. This is an important policy in-and-of-itself, but I think it's also symbolic of the need to help children in the K-12 system confront the barriers that they face even before they come to the classroom, so that they can succeed while they are in the class. Whether you agree with the solution we are proposing or not, I do think

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65 Brian Pallister: Brian Pallister is a Canadian politician who served as the 22nd Premier of Manitoba from 2015 to 2021. Pallister served as leader of the Progressive Conservative Party from 2012 to 2021.

66 Hugh McFadyen: Hugh McFadyen is a Canadian politician who served as leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba, and Leader of the Opposition from 2006 to 2012.

67 Frank Albo: Frank Albo is a Canadian architectural historian and is currently an Adjunct Professor of History at the University of Winnipeg where he specializes in architecture, Freemasonry, and the Western esoteric tradition.

68 Referring to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

this is an issue that has been brought forward by educators, been brought forward by other public voices, and that people in Manitoba have been pushing for. So, this is one example of how I think on some days, the role of leader of the opposition is mainly about holding the government to account, but on other days, it is because a critical mass of the community wants a solution brought forward to address a problem that the government of the day isn't implementing or pursuing. I shared supervised consumption sites as another idea. Both Premiers Pallister and Stefanson[69] have been opposed to this idea, but there are a lot of people in the community that say this should be at least part of the response to the addiction crisis. And so, that is something that we've been bringing forward since 2017 or 2018. Again, I think it's a balancing act, and if we are just talking about brass-tactics and reality, the media and the public is more interested in hearing a critique of government, rather than hearing a proposal from an opposition party that isn't in a position to implement the proposal. Even if we're able to bring forward proposals every day, I'm not sure how many would get through. Whereas, if we point out, "hey, the government is getting it wrong on this healthcare issue, or on this economic issue," that typically tends to get noticed more. I think it's about striking a balance, and I think the balance of the opposition leader is best arrived at when you are representing the people of Manitoba's desire to both hold the government to account, but also have some new public policy issues brought forward.

BPS: During COVID, there's a bunch of people making decisions. You've got the healthcare bureaucracy, particularly the office of the Chief Public Health Officer. You've got the elected government; you've got the opposition. My sense is one of the useful things that politicians do is get the unfiltered view of the people. People, I'm guessing, talk to their elected politicians. Sometimes it's more emotion, sometimes more candor, sometimes with more diplomacy than in other forms, I'm talking about the unfiltered internet. Bureaucrats and government might think something, but the reality might be quite different, right? An example is when the government told everyone to mask up.[70] But I've worked in a university and

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69 Heather Stefanson is a Canadian politician who served as the 24th Premier of Manitoba from 2021-2023. Stefanson served as the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba.

70 Colloquially referring to wearing a face mask.

even the theory that everyone would mask up, looking around the law school, a lot of people weren't masked up. So, there's a reality that I think elected politicians of all stripes can bring to governing, that does not occur through other channels, I think. Did you have lines of communication with government where you were able to approach ministers and the Premier and say, "you know, you may not appreciate it but people in my community, I know your intentions are good, but this is working badly," or "this is unrealistic." Were you able to act in reality as an information channel to the actual decision maker?

WK: Not really. I wouldn't say not at all. I would just say I think the decision-making was very centralized at the cabinet table and in the Premier's office during COVID. The reason why I wouldn't say we had no input was because there were a few instances where information was shared with us, but this was relatively limited. I think we had about four briefings from the Provincial Public Health Officer and the healthcare bureaucracy through the entirety of the pandemic. So, over the course of 2020 until whenever we moved out of code red last year, we would have had four briefings that varied between maybe an hour, maybe 90 minutes to two hours at most.

BPS: It's like there was a one-way flow of information. You're getting briefed, but it's not a dialogic thing, it's like, "okay, we've been doing this, we are not sure if it's working. You're not being asked for your opinion or encouraged to give suggestions. It's more like, "we are here to inform you." Does that sound like that's the way it went?

WK: Yes, and there's conditions on it too. Part of it was conditions that I think are totally legitimate. These are civil servants that are briefing us. They are non-partisan civil servants. We should respect their non-partisan nature and should not just run in front of camera and say, "hey, so-and-so told me this," you know? I think they are sharing certain information with us in confidence that we should respect. But I think it was a decision of government not to have decision-makers in those meetings to purposely prevent that two-way sharing of information. So, we could suggest to a civil servant who may or may not pass that suggestion along, but I'm pretty skeptical that there was some of that. Then when it came to the actual decision-makers, meaning the Premier and cabinet, I would say we had

pretty limited ability to provide advice directly. I'll give you one example that could maybe serve as a case example. It was just by tabling a bill, I tabled the bill in 2020 that basically said there should be a working group to sort through the various privacy issues around implementing an app that would have people's health data, and stuff like that. And then I heard from second-hand sources that the Premier of the day did ask people, "what do you think of this idea? Is this a good idea? Should we have people dedicated to sorting through some of the privacy and data management concerns, some of the tech concerns that some of the politicians don't understand?" So, I do know that some of the concerns were taken seriously. Then later on when government did roll out the app and the vaccine cards and all the issues did actually come into place maybe a year or so later. To me, that is not the sort of thing you are talking about. This is not me approaching Pallister in the hallway and saying, "hey I think we should do x, y, z." This is me tabling a bill in the House and then government taking the bill for consideration later. The other avenue I would flag for you is our House leader, in various negotiations with the government House leader who is one of the people we spoke to in his capacity as former Premier. But he was also House leader throughout this period. This was mainly a one-way flow of information too, which is like, "hey we are bring in in these certain changes which provide us certain emergency powers, we are bringing in these changes which will allow these sectors of the economy to function in this new way", or "we are bringing in this new legislative change to do x, y, z for the healthcare system." And sometimes, through our House leader we would say, "well, we don't think that is the right approach", "maybe you should consider this", or maybe we would say, "well, what about this other idea in addition to what government is proposing." So, we did have some ability to have a back-and-forth through the House leader negotiations, but by and large that was also predominantly a one-directional relationship. And then of course we would have the normal, I think the most effective way in which we were able to communicate with government was through the media. I think that started in 2020 on a relatively slow day, they [the government] announced that they were going to stop doing briefings, I think it was over the weekend. We just pointed out that government should probably keep informing people when they are going out to Clear Lake, and Canada Day, and all the other important summer activities, the government should probably keep updating them on what's happening with COVID in the province. And then, you see pressure exerted on the government, and eventually that

pressure builds and they're either forced to or not entertain some kind of reversal of positions, so from that point on I think we saw that the media was the most effective way to give voice to the people of Manitoba and try to exert pressure on government to reverse things that we thought were ineffective, or take action in areas that we thought government was ignoring the need to act

BPS: Do you think that the lack of dialogue, a unilateral briefing model rather than actual dialogue, I mean you could imagine during a crisis situation there would be a lot of backchannels that government would set up with other parties, sitting down and saying, "well, what are your people saying? What do you think we should do?" It doesn't sound like the form of channels operated, was that in any way connected with the restriction of physical proximity? You weren't in the legislature regularly, being unmasked with government folks. The dynamics, the operations, that sort of thing.

WK: No, I think it had more to do with the centralization of power within the Premier's office. Just the partisan approach to government versus opposition. Because this approach that I am describing did prevail both when we were more on the lockdown and remote form of engagement within the legislature and the times when we were back in person, and, if not at full complement, closer to full complement. So, I don't think this was a function as a result of COVID rules as opposed to the general approach to politics.

Darcy L. MacPherson (DLM): One of the things I found interesting is that we started out by talking about what the proper role of opposition party is in the political process that we have. I am curious what you think when you are not operating in a dialogic way, you're not in a physical space with the opposing party, whether government or otherwise. How do you think that affected your way, the NDPs ability, I'm not trying to personalize this to you, but do you think this impacted the ability of the opposition to carry out its role of holding the government to account? Was it more difficult because of firstly, the restrictions, and secondly, because of the type of government approach that there was, in your view?

WK: Well, I think it was a steep learning curve, to your point. Meaning, at first, we didn't know how to do our jobs in the new reality that COVID

presented. We had to do our best as quickly as possible how to operate in this new environment. To give you the broad strokes of the learning curve that I am escribing, at the start of the pandemic, during the first wave, I think there was a rally around the flag effect. You had the briefings with the Premier, and Dr. Roussin,[71] and Linette Siragusa,[72] and even if we had something important to say, nobody would report on it. We could not get a message out to the public during the early phase. Like everyone else, we learned to use digital tools such as Zoom and social media and other platforms, those resources to organize, and to listen, and to draw people in. Working through the other issue around COVID briefings that I described earlier, and later on into the year where we were leaning into preparing the healthcare system for potential waves, which did eventually arrive and effectively swamp the healthcare system. We were trying to raise the alarm on those issues. I think we got more effective at those things as we began to get better at using those tools. Previously, we may have done in-person events and campaigns, we began launching digital campaigns and digital events in 2020, and then in 2021 I would say, it really hit the most effective level where we saw the campaign against Bill 64,[73] which was not a specific COVID issue per say, but was heavily coloured by what was going on with COVID, and all the attention shifted to a focus on remote learning in the K-12 system.

DLM: Bill 64, if I remember correctly – did the Bill purport to get rid of all school boards at one point?

WK: Yes, it was a very dramatic change to the K-12 education system, it would have eliminated school divisions and would have caused a bunch of

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71 Dr. Brent Roussin: Dr. Brent Roussin is a practicing physician and a specialist in public health and preventative medicine. Dr. Roussin serves as Manitoba's chief public health officer and was appointed June 2, 2019.

72 Linette Siragusa: Linette Siragusa is a registered nurse who joined Shared Health in 2017 and served as the organization's first chief nursing officer and provincial lead of health system integration and quality. Siragusa was named CEO of Shared Health in April of 2023.

73 Bill 64: The *Education Modernization Act* was legislation that proposed the elimination of democratically elected school boards. The English school divisions in Manitoba would have been continued under a single board that would administer education within the 15 regions in Manitoba. The bill was withdrawn in the fall of 2021.

other changes to take place with the way teachers work, with principals, and the way local communities have input in how schools are operated. Even things such as bussing for students in rural areas, there was many changes proposed, but, why it is germane to this question you posed earlier is, first of all, we used a legislative tool, the five-bill delay tool, we used this tool to stop the bill and hold the bill over the summer, and then we used the digital tools such as Zoom townhall meetings, online surveys, online petitions, lawn sign campaigns, along with other stakeholders such as the Manitoba Teachers Society, Manitoba Schoolboards Association, and many other stakeholder groups, even concerned, creative citizens coming up with their own unique lawn signs, graphic art, stuff like that. We used these resources to build the ground swell for awareness and opposition for the Bill, such that it became one of the defining questions in the PC leadership contest. So, the Bill was withdrawn by government, which we viewed as a victory. But, from where we went from the start of COVID, where we were trying to find out how to talk to people. How do we listen to the voices of the community? The Bill 64 campaign, where it was a very methodical, and effective approach towards holding the government to account, I think that represented a pretty important learning experience for us, in how do you actually carry on your business as opposition within this new environment that the pandemic presented.

BPS: We will go back to COVID shortly, I was just going to ask you, there's always a question of balance between the elected government's right to govern, and the ability of opposition to rally, stop, and delay government, and how the rules have an appropriate balance. After the compromise, it seems to me that the compromise worked well. The compromise, to me, was that the opposition party can identify a limited number of bills that can be held over, that gives them time to rally opposition, make a fuss. Most of government mandates go through, but the few, most problematic issues are delayed, and in the case of Bill 64, was ultimately abandoned in the face of public opposition. It seems to me that compromise actually worked quite well. Is that your view? And is the balance between the current rules between the ability of government to govern and the ability of the opposition to slow down and obstruct? Do you think we [Manitoba] have gotten this right, procedurally?

WK: You know, this is the only set of rules that I have ever known, because I was elected in 2016, and when I was sworn in, it was the first legislative session when these rules took effect. So, I can't offer a comparative analysis, but I do think that it strikes a balance. The reason why I say it strikes a balance in a positive sense is, yes, the opposition has the ability to delay and potentially create a groundswell for the public to abandon a proposed piece of legislation. But the rules also guarantee the business that government carries on. So, for instance, this isn't a specific rule, but the byproduct of the rules is that the government always gets their budget, every year. For instance, there is no debt ceiling showdown like we see in the United States, the lights won't be turned off because the government runs out of money. From my prospective, I wouldn't rule out the prospect of future improvements to the rule, but I could see these rules continuing to work well. I believe there is a good balance under the current rules.

BPS: I don't know if you're in a position to take a side on this, but we have the opposition, we have the elected government. You mentioned the centralization of the Premier's office, you also have the power of the permanent bureaucracy, through all my interviews, I make a point in stating that I believe in civilian control of the military, and I believe in civilian control of public health officials. When making society-wide decisions, it should be an all-of-government decision process, a public health officer may get in [to power], but ultimately, it's the responsibility of government to weigh all the factors, health, education-based, the economy, public compliance, all of these factors. I do think that our current legislative structure is antiquated, because it's contemplated by public health decision-making and confirmed by one minister and not the whole cabinet. We [Manitoba] also don't have the safeguard of the *Emergencies Act*[74] like at the federal level, making sure that the legislature is doing regular oversight. My view is that the current legislative framework is kind of antiquated. Do you have any view on that? Do you think we need to have some kind of review or learning exercise as a result of the COVID experience? As you can tell, I have some views of the needs to modernize emergency decision-making. Do you have any thoughts? I know some people want to move on. My view is that when a society goes through something like COVID, it is a good idea

[74] *Emergencies Act*: The *Emergencies Act* is 1985 legislation to authorize the taking of special temporary measures to ensure safety and security during national emergencies.

to review the system, not to vilify people, because those were tough decisions, but to assess how the systems, especially government systems, can be improved. Feel free to disagree.

WK: I think there should be a public inquiry. I think it should have a term of reference that is very forward-facing. Fact recommendations of the future, whether it is another pandemic, or another emergency, you know, public emergency in Manitoba. How can we learn from what we went through? I think it is smart governance, an organizational practice whenever you have something that is as traumatic or earth changing as the pandemic was, that you stop and take stock. Ask those questions: What went right? What went wrong? What can we do better in the future? And I think the question that you raised about the interplay between the Premier, the Health Minister, the Chief Provincial Health Officer, and public health orders or policy, I think that is an important public policy question, and I think a public inquiry should be tasked with recommending where do we go from here? I agree that it is antiquated, I think that while the legislation may say that it is the Health Minister, and de facto, the Premier making the decisions, that's just a byproduct of our political system, where the primus inter pares principle reigns. If the Health Minister is not following the wishes of the Premier, they may not belong for that job. I can see arguments from both perspectives in terms of what you actually do with the Provincial Public Health Officer role. On the one hand, you want expert advice, expert opinion, and expert decision-making. So that suggests that maybe it should be the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer who should be the one to make the final call. On the flip side of that, you may argue, well, what happens if there is a rogue Provincial Public Health Officer? That person does not have to face the public in the same way a public official does. They do not have the same level of accountability. You should then go down the rabbit hole of well, then let's have a committee where they must appear before the public and answer questions. Things like that. From the other perspective, you could frame the argument that you [Brian P. Schwartz] made, that folks in the Premier's office and members of government were elected to make decisions on behalf of the people of Manitoba. So, shouldn't they be the final arbitrators? Considering the expert advice, balancing this against other probabilities, and then making the best decision. I think the issue we saw in Manitoba, to take it out of the realm of theory, is we saw a phenomenon in Manitoba where the Chief Provincial

Public Health Officer was put out in public as sort of almost a puppet figure, and they were positioned, and you can even find quotes in the media where it was said that they were the one making the decisions. The true decision maker, the Premier's office, was using them as a shield to avoid accountability. So, what I would like, if we are going to stick with the model where the elected official is the ultimate arbitrator in these types of decisions, we must remove the veil of the "expert" and we have the accountability questions publicly understood to go where they should be going, which is to the decision-maker, the Premier, the cabinet minister directly. You can see how this is a public issue, which is why having an expert panel analyze these issues and arrive at a recommendation, including maybe some recommendations to the Public Health Officer role, and potential legislative changes, I think that is the best way to go.

BPS: I think it's hard to plan during the emergency, because it's an emergency. People are upset, agitated, dealing with incomplete information. Whether its logistics about having hospital systems sped up, having enough medical supplies, making sure internet doesn't meltdown, whatever it is. If you can pre-think before the crisis, have the systems set up, that would be the ideal. It's about "what did we learn?" It's not about pointing fingers and outing them.

WK: Yeah, future facing, I think that's the operative.

BPS: Yeah, I think the irony to me is the federal *Emergencies Act* was introduced after the *War Measures Act*,[75] but before a crisis. The federal *Emergencies Act* has lots of checks and balances, but it wasn't used until the Convoy.[76] Government wanted to leave it to the provinces, and some of the provinces were offering what I think was very outdated statutory frameworks. It's not about left or right partisanship. There should be ways

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75 *War Measures Act*: The *War Measures Act* was passed by the Parliament of Canada on August 22, 1914, and gave the federal government broad powers to maintain security and order during "war, invasion, or insurrection."

76 Trucker convoy: The Freedom Convoy originated in early 2022 and was created originally to protest vaccine mandates for crossing the United States border. Beginning in January of 2022, hundreds of vehicles formed convoys from several points and traversed Canadian provinces before emerging on Ottawa for a rally at Parliament Hill.

in which people get together and think through what the structure of decision-making should be. As you can tell, I lean more towards the political accountability model. I think you hear from experts, but there are so many dimensions to a problem that ultimately the elected cabinet must decide, and other people will disagree, but at least I think that stuff should be thought-out when you are not in a crisis. Because when you are in a crisis, you are not going to be able to think effectively when dealing with a crisis. As I was mentioning, the *Emergencies Act* was well executed in my view in terms of constantly saying that government must declare the scope of the emergency, setting the sunset clause, making sure that the elected people are confidently overseeing government. The Legislative Assembly did meet, kept going in Manitoba. All the parties were together, I think to make sure it was working in some way. You had distancing, with limited people, but at least it was still working. My interpretation of what you are saying, feel free to correct or elaborate, in your understanding of events, it wasn't the physical proximity problem that affected absence of dialogue, it had more to do with the politics and choices, tendencies of government anyway. It would have been pretty much the same outcome if you had been meeting with the whole NDP opposition, Liberals, and the whole of Government. It wasn't really about the technology; it was more about a style of government. Is that a fair paraphrase?

WK: Yeah, I think so.

DLM: This is one of the things that really interest me, and I would like your input on this. I think the government is at a crossroad. Because the next emergency is probably not that far off. We've seen wildfires throughout the country at various points, affecting parts of the country, and so on and so forth. The next emergency, we don't know what it is. It probably won't be COVID directly, but it's going to be something that isn't 100 years away. So, do you think that the time horizon may actually benefit us? In the sense that, when something is fifty years away, frankly, the leaders of today, unless you're the Harry Walsh[77] of the legal profession, who practiced law until he was 93 years old, those leaders of today are unlikely to be in leadership roles

[77] Harry Walsh: Harry Walsh was a Canadian lawyer who practiced criminal law for more than 70 years. Walsh was a leading proponent for the abolition of capital punishment in Canada.

50 years from now. But if the next emergency is fifteen or twenty years away, there are going to be people in the room somewhere that are making decisions about the next emergency, who are going to live through the next emergency [who were present during the COVID emergency].

WK: Yeah, I think of the H1N1 pandemic, I was a reporter at the time. I covered the story, and I do think that was the last time the ICU capacity in Manitoba was permanently increased was after the H1N1 emergency. It was based on recommendations about, "what did we learn from this experience?" That emergency was not nearly as destructive as COVID, although it did have an impact on the province. There were still questions asked around what I would say was an inappropriate response with First Nations people in some avenues. There were also questions surrounding the distribution and use of masks and other medical supplies. So, I think there was a response from H1N1, but by the time we got to COVID, the masks had expired, we had short supply of other medical devices and supplies, and some of the other, I guess contingency plans, in the interim had been degraded. For instance, the ICU capacity that was permanently expanded after the H1N1 crisis had been cut during the 2017 consolidation of hospitals in Manitoba. So, all that to say, not only should there be a post-pandemic exercise to help us plan for the next emergency. But somehow, we need a collective memory, a mechanism to allow us to not forget the lessons. Because I can tell you we are already forgetting some of the lessons COVID provided. Look at the long-term care system. During the darkest moments of the pandemic, Maples, Riverview, you know, what was happening in personal care homes were some of the most emotional and heart wrenching scenes, and yet look at the state of personal care homes today.[78] There have been very little permanent improvements to the situation there. So, what is the public policy mechanism such that we remember the lessons of COVID, so not just the next government, but successive governments don't just say, "well, you know, that made sense in the early 2020's, but I think we can make some changes to healthcare or emergency measures, or stock piles, in a way that may ultimately be short-

[78] The Maples and Riverview Personal Care homes are located in Winnipeg, MB. The Maples Personal Care home was the site of one of the deadliest COVID outbreaks in Manitoba during the COVID pandemic. The disaster lasted from October 20, 2020, to January 12, 2021. 231 residents and staff were infected, and 56 individuals were killed.

sighted. I think that deliberation, how do you establish that collective memory? I think to your point, we have to bear in mind that the next emergency or crisis may look different from the previous one. It could be a natural disaster, certainly there's lots of flooding and wildfires in Manitoba. It could be a public health emergency in Manitoba similar to the one we just went through. There could also be a technological situation, like an internet outage or some sort of big hack, an AI situation. Maybe it's a financial crisis. Who knows what the next emergency will be. We have to strike that balance between learning the lessons, not forgetting them, and having a suitably broad understanding such that the learnings may actually be applicable the next time we need them.

BPS: Really why we are conducting these interviews with the three leaders on COVID right now, we at the [Manitoba] Law Journal we're going to publish an issue where we talk to people in the legal practice – judges, lawyers, civil servants – we were trying to establish some kind of record about what happened during COVID, while it was still relatively fresh in memory. I don't know about you, but to me, we are already encountering this COVID blur. It was a three-year blur, I don't quite remember how we got through it but now we are back. We have three issues we are doing at the Journal, one on the use of the federal *Emergencies Act*, we are doing this series with you and the other party leaders, and then we have one with the legal profession, all with the intention of recording the pandemic memory while it is still alive. I don't know if it's just subjective, but I find we've talked to a lot of people where years, months went by one-at-a-time. But COVID kind of homogenized, blurred the memory already. Selene, Darcy, do you find that when you ask people about COVID, there's something about what happened that is kind of blurred?

DLM: Yeah, I think Manitobans are particularly good or bad at that. I think we do that with weather. Every November, there's this thing where when it snows, everyone needs snow tires, everyone needs supplies. Yeah, its November in Winnipeg, of course it's cold. I call it collective meteorological amnesia that we go through every year when we do this. We have the tendency to just go, "well I mean we go through it, the summer was nice, great, terrific."

BPS: That's true. My standing joke is people say the winter [in Winnipeg] builds character. My response at this point is, "I have enough character." I don't need anymore. Anyway, going back to the business of government, and something that you were referring to earlier, it's always been a question I've asked throughout the series is, what is the impact of the inside game of the legislative assembly and the real world? There was a time many decades ago, a province such as Saskatchewan, they didn't have internet, they didn't have 100 T.V. channels, they didn't have professional sports, people were really into what happened within the precinct of the legislature. People would follow the debates; people would comment on a bad speech or a great question. Now, you are competing with the rest of the world for attention – bloggers, channels, everything that's going on – you don't have a large press gallery like you used to in Manitoba. Not many people regularly following you. So, there's different approaches, I don't know the answer that's why I'm asking the question. Remember when Stephen Harper was Prime Minister, he would consume huge executive and staff time getting ready for question period. Obviously, he thought it was very important to be prepared. Was it really important? I don't know. But, you've mentioned during the COVID crisis all these other mediums of communication. You mentioned the internet, people in the assembly may take it very seriously, how they performed during a particular questioning. What is your sense about the inside game, what actually goes on in debates, does the inside game make that much of a difference in partisan or practical politics? Or are we reaching an age where it's not that important anymore? The actual debate, the actual questioning.

WK: Well, I think we try to use it to reach a wider audience. We share clips from question period, or we share a message from a debate, or a message from a bill which we introduced. Through social media, through other digital channels we try to share to the mainstream media as well. I do think it continues to be relevant. I also think coming out of COVID, we can see that the COVID experience had an impact on the attention of Manitobans in many ways. The biggest impact was, I think, leading into the pandemic, the average Manitoban by habit would not have paid much attention to the provincial political scene. But then all of a sudden Brian Pallister was telling you that you couldn't leave your house anymore. The provincial government was saying you had to stay indoors and could not see your loved ones over the holidays because the healthcare system was on the verge of

collapse. Now all of a sudden everyone is watching the Premier's briefing, everyone is watching the daily updates, it became a spectator sport during the pandemic, for lack of a better term. This is because the province all of a sudden assumes this hugely important and destructive and consequential role in the day-to-day lives of Manitobans. So, as a result of the provincial government and everything taking place at the Legislature, it takes a huge amount of bandwidth in everyone's lives. And I think the pendulum swings as you emerge from the pandemic, and people want to exhale and get away from that period in their lives. And they say, "you know what, I don't want to listen to news and politics as much as I did before." And we even see that in the press gallery in certain ways. The press gallery continues to cover the provincial political scene, but once they started monitoring us by video during the pandemic, by and large they have continued to monitor us by video, and it's rare to see someone physically in the press gallery within the chamber. It's probably only happened a handful of times in a session. So even the most engaged journalists, that are still doing important work, reporting the big developments and broad strokes of what happened, but it's been changed by the pandemic, and it's now in this post-pandemic, more digital, more distant kind of reality that all of us and all aspects of our society have started to get used to.

BPS: Your point about the amount of policy fatigue, that's something we found when we were interviewing people in the profession and the civil service. We asked them about the innovation, things they had to do that they had never done before, video hearings for interim relief and that sort of stuff. So, they said, "yeah, we got together, we rose to the occasion, and everyone cooperated." Then we discussed what was next? What else could potentially come from this? Is there further innovation coming? And frankly, the answer we tended to get was no, there was enough innovation. They said they went through an incredibly draining period where they did things they had never done before, had to work great hours under great stress. So, they found they were no longer in innovation mode, but consolidation mode. They needed a period of peace before they do brave, new things again. They were exhausted, that was the vibe that I got when talking to people in the profession and civil service. It's not like, "oh, we innovated, so let's do a lot more!" It was a desire for a period of calm, kind of like how we were talking about people's interest in political politics. They were tuned in, and now they're not paying attention. Enough policy,

enough government, like, "can I just do my backyard barbecues for a while?" What's your sense of people, is it harder to get people's attention after that incredibly intense political period? Is there still some fatigue from that, or is it fading?

WK: I think there has been a general impact on the mental health of the public, and I think we see that in a lot of different areas. It's certainly visible in society-at-large, and I think in terms of divisions along partisan lines in our political world. I think there is a general mental health impact which has made an impact beyond fatigue. It's an increased stress level that is the baseline publicly. Ideally, we find a way to heal that and bring people back together again. In the meantime, it's going to be something that we have to contend with.

BPS: Sorry, I was going to ask Selene – You've lived through this as a student, my comment is that we didn't fully assimilate as professors, because we had it easier. We could Zoom our lectures, did not have to be in the building that much. We were delivering, we did not have to write exams and stuff. You folks [students] did have to. Students had an extremely stressful two or three years. I have a sense that your cohort is feeling a switch back, like "okay, everyone is okay again." Do you think this will be like the war years? I'm just curious of your experience as a student. Any reflection, is this something people will be telling their grandkids about? Or is it just an unpleasant blimp and life goes on?

Selene Sharpe (SS): Yeah, I think the general sense I get from my cohort is, the main struggle was more social issues rather than academic-focused. You had lots of time at home to do school, it may have been difficult for some people who learn better in a classroom, but I think that it took a little longer, it felt like we were set back a couple years with our social skills. My year was a little bit luckier because we got to actually go to events and stuff like that. I think the year above me [3L], their attendance with social events was super low even when we could go back, because they were still trying to adapt to the times.

BPS: Things that were taken for granted, beer and cheese on a Friday night, things that would have been routine, things that you just go to. COVID broke the chain, and people did not have an easy time restoring social

traditions that existed before. So, you're saying even though the restrictions were finally over, noting that U of M was one of the last places to lift restrictions, your sense is the social vibe is not quite back.

SS: Honestly, I think I have a bit of a memory loss with COVID. So, I think it was a lot more difficult than I recall. So, I think we are just now warming back up to each other. And even now, I don't know if it would have been like this regardless [of the pandemic], where people are sticking to their own social circles rather than being totally social again.

BPS: One observation, when they first came out with these big internet courses, the conventional thinking was that people can listen to the best lectures in the world, and people will sign up for the courses from all over the place. The empirical evidence showed that people did not stick to this. Rationally, you should say, "why do I need to waste time chatting with my students [who] constantly complain about the professor?" Turns out attentiveness rates, stick-to-itiveness rates, graduation rates were very low in the first wave of the internet schooling. Now, people go back to in-person courses, my guess is that there is a durability of human contact that is a bit unexpected. If you look at it rationally, it's a huge waste of time to commute [to school] and chat with friends, but it turns out we are still social creatures, and these are some of the things that matter most. For most of us, the inefficiency and being in-person and so on, it's surprisingly counterbalanced by the ability to be social with people. Any thoughts on that?

SS: Personally, it depends on what kind of learner you are, but I personally really like the after-class, I think its beneficial to talk about what was just learned with your peers. So, that was something that I missed a lot. Even just having that break time, I think if you're constantly on, you will burnout quicker. So, personally, my focus is a lot better when in-person, and I get little breaks in between, rather than listening to a three-hour podcast of classes without any visual stimulation. From personal experience I found it a lot more difficult being online rather than in-person.

BPS: Just to add, Wab had mentioned mental health, that seems to me that your generation has a lot of challenges there.

DLM: One of the things that you mentioned was a heightened anxiety or something in the mental health space for most people. I am curious how that plays into your idea of a cross-political view of COVID. It seems to me we've made people more nervous, more partisan, more tribal in some aspects. If you were king of the world, or the person making the decisions, how would you get around that, in terms of the hyper partisanship that, during or after an emergency can linger. Like, "listen, we've all been through this." The stereotypical example that I always think of was John Mckeenan and John Parry, different political parties in the U.S., had different views of the war, different roles in the war, but both took great meaning to get our POWs home and worked very hard to do that, and left their politics at the door. How would you mirror that in this political environment? Do you have thoughts about how you would try to break free some of the partisanship?

WK: Well, I think that part of it has to do with the constitution of the expert panel that you assemble. Part of it has to do with the terms of reference that are set. In both instances, I think you would want to take what you are saying in mind. That said, I think you do have to hold the line on science and shared acceptance of facts. So, I think you would want to bring together a group of people who are going to be respected and acknowledged as experts, but also have a certain degree of emotional intelligence so that they can engage with people in a meaningful way. I would also want the terms of reference to be less about finding fault and assigning blame, and more about forward facing recommendations to making Manitoba better in the future. So, I think that exercise of drafting the terms for the inquiry should lean [heavily] on a specific scope that is then tied to what you want to find in the future. Or what you want to find in the form of recommendations for the future. For instance, when we talk about some of the experience in the healthcare system, I would less like to get into who was making the decision, and who do we point the finger at, and focus much more on things like, we saw the ICU system out of control and out of capacity, what is the ideal number of ICU beds? What is the education and healthcare investments we need to make in order to meet that number? We saw issues with patient transportation of ICU patients, what's the path forward here? Is it a public approach? Is it a hybrid approach? Is it a private approach that is heavily regulated and has a strong regulation with strong conditions surrounding quality? So, I think being

very deliberate and careful with the way you set everything up, with an eye towards the future, and trying to engage more on the substance that is going to interest Manitobans. By interest, I mean the public interest. The public interest should be the focus.

BPS: During COVID, what we have started to do in Pan-Canadian politics, where Indigenous government is much more recognized, in theory, in partnership with the provincial and federal government; how do you think policy Manitoba or government of Canada did in terms of consulting with Indigenous communities and making policy during COVID? Did governments get the balance right? I don't have a sense of how that actually worked in practice. Do you have any thoughts on how public relations went with Indigenous government during the crisis?

WK: Yeah, I would also reframe it in this way: Years of work that had been done by technical, medical, and scientific leaders in Indigenous communities enabled these communities to hit the ground running during this crisis. For instance, if we go through this pandemic inquiry exercise, and we ask, "what are some of the things that worked?" I would first point to the First Nations COVID task force as one of the things that worked. Maybe it wasn't perfect, maybe there's room for improvement. The idea that Indigenous physicians and health experts working along with Indigenous community leaders to own and share publicly the data around Indigenous health and then to thereby inform the decisions that were made with Indigenous communities, I do think shows us a best practice for something that was long argued, in theory. Folks in the Indigenous health world, having Indigenous control, Indigenous possession of data, Indigenous self-determination in healthcare decisions is the way to go. COVID gave us the task force, which put some of those principles into practice. In large measure I think they worked well. We can look at some examples, for instance, during the first wave when people were "panic buying," the Northern

Chiefs' Organization, the MKO,[79] with Dr. Barry Lavallee,[80] made a recommendation to communities, "yes, go buy the supplies that you need," but also, "hunters, fill up the freezers." So, you have health advice that is culture-specific and relevant to the people in those communities, which is informed by science and evidence, but also in terminology that makes sense. We saw that throughout the contact-tracing phase, through the vaccine rollout phase, and into the current phase. So, I think there are some good examples to look at there. The reason I say reframe is because you had some folks like Dr. Marsha Anderson,[81] and Barry Lavallee, Melanie MacKinnon,[82] Cathy Cook,[83] and many others who had been working with these principles in practise for many years. They were ready to go. So, when a crisis emerged where we saw the need for implementation, they were able to be marshalled quickly. I would look at that for a potential best practice, not only for the Indigenous community, but also when looking at other areas that may impact other cultural communities or the broader public where we can identify expertise that we may need to tap the shoulder of in times of crisis. I always try to look at things, when we see something in the Indigenous community that is interesting, let's look at that in a way that can

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79 MKO: The Maniotba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc., incorporated in 1981, is a not-for-profit, political advocacy organization that provides a collective voice on issues of inherent, Treaty, Aboriginal and human rights for the citizens of the sovereign First Nations represented. The MKO First Nations are signatory to Treaties 4, 5, 6, and 10.

80 Dr. Barry Lavallee: Dr. Barry Lavellee received his medical degree in 1988 and completed his training in family medicine in 1990. Dr. Lavallee is a Doctor of Medicine (MD) a member of the Métis community of St. Laurent, Manitoba, and a descendent of Duck Bay and Lake Manitoba First Nations.

81 Dr. Marsha Anderson: Dr. Marsha Anderson, MD is a Cree-Anishinaabe who graduated in 2002 from the University of Manitoba. In 2022, Dr. Anderson became vice-dean Indigenous health, social justice, and anti-racism, Rady Faculty of Health Sciences.

82 Melanie MacKinnon: Melanie MacKinnon is executive director Indigenous Institute of Health and Healing, Rady Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Manitoba.

83 Cathy Cook: Dr. Catherine L. Cook is Métis and grew up in Northern Manitoba. She received her undergraduate and postgraduate medical education at the University of Manitoba (MD, 1987). She is an associate professor in the department of community health sciences, Rady Faculty of Health Sciences. Dr. Cook also served as provincial lead, Indigenous health at Shared Health until taking on the role of Vice-President (Indigenous) full-time in April 2020.

benefit Indigenous communities, but also the mainstream population as well.

BPS: During COVID I teach a program in Israel every year, and its usually about start-up nations. I re-jigged it [during COVID] to assess how you deal with decisions during times of crisis. I used to say, Israel is a pretty good place to study how to make decisions during times of crisis, because there is always a crisis in Israel, since inception. Always a different crisis, but a crisis no less. Indigenous communities - let's say you are an Indigenous community in the north, and you've gone through many different crises. You name it, whether it was destruction of the economy, world wars, the disastrous series of hydro projects in the 1960's and 1970's, time after time communities have faced decisions on a scale and with consequences that most other communities did not have to deal with, with the same kind of destructive consequences. Were there lessons learned from the way Indigenous communities deal with crisis? Or points you observed from leaders during crisis that you can bring to the mainstream COVID crisis?

WK: I'm sure there are a bunch of specific examples we could point to. But, maybe at a very high level, most forms of Indigenous governance operate on a consensus model, which in some scenarios can be very painstaking to arrive at a consensus. But they almost invariably result in a fairly robust decision-making process that is also able to sustain buy-in from the community. I think there is real important governance questions there for us, after the pandemic about how we can learn some examples of arriving at a consensus or operating at a consensus. Consensus does not necessarily mean unanimity, but it just means forming a general shared direction that sustains and supports the community. I think at various points in the pandemic, we were all on the same page. We were all on the same page when we were cheering on our healthcare heroes, and when we were moved when we said we had to do better for seniors in our community and senior's care in our society. When it came to the convoy issue, we became very divisive and divided. I think one of the important issues we should grapple with as a society is how can we bring everyone together as a society now? I'm sure there are examples from Indigenous governance that would be helpful in healing the divide. I'm sure there are examples, such as the ones you've alluded to that can be helpful for us to lean on. I'm sure we could canvass other leaders for their ideas on how we can bring people back together

again. I do think one of the social risks that we must contend with now is how do we come together and form a shared direction for our province? Bearing in mind that we just came out of a very difficult period together.

BPS: Thank you so much for your time, and for your thoughtful answers. I really enjoyed this. Wab, anything I have missed that you would like to address? Selene, Darcy, anything you would like to add before we wrap this interview up?

DLM: I wanted to ask, I saw in the research that your wife is a medical doctor, that is correct right?

WK: Yes.

DLM: That must have been helpful, in the middle of a public health emergency, to have someone in your life that knows their way around the healthcare system intimately. I just wanted to give you the chance to comment on how that may have changed some of your perspectives, to have that insider knowledge from someone who sits across the dinner table.

WK: Well, first of all, I think most importantly it helps to have someone smarter than you around to give you advice. That is definitely the case when you have Lisa Monkman, MD,[84] sitting across the dinner table [laughs]. It came up in different ways at different periods of the pandemic. In the early stages, it was, "holy cow, you're going to the front lines to work during a global crisis. Go save the world!" That's very inspiring. At other times during the pandemic, you would see these bureaucratic decisions being made, the head-scratching decisions. For example, you would hear during the pandemic, "this person is allowed to wear an N-95 mask, that person working right beside them is not allowed to wear an N-95." You would think, "surely there has to be a better approach to this public health emergency than what we were currently pursing in Manitoba." At other points in the pandemic, it was important to just listen in situations, such as a briefing or media update, like, "here's some new approach we are pursuing

[84] Lisa Monkman: Dr. Lisa Monkman represents the North Electoral District on CPSM Council. She has been on Council since 2022. She is Chair of the CPSM Truth and Reconciliation Advisory Circle.

in the healthcare system," or "here's some new response that is about to be rolled out." Then, over and above the other medical experts we talked to, just to be able to ask in the evening, "how are things going to play out in hospitals? How will this play out in a rural centre as opposed to an urban one?" So, I think that having a multitude of sources is always beneficial when you are trying to arrive at decisions that will impact the public. Certainly, elected leaders are always well-served when they have an official cabinet, but also well-served when they have a so-called "kitchen cabinet" as well, which is how we often refer to the inner-circle of personal relationships that we turn to, family and friends who we bounce ideas off of.

DLM: My next question is, we talked a little bit about the desire to sort of have this whole situation in the past. A big blur of three years. What's the most memorable thing, either positive, negative, or both about this period for you, as you were going through it in your role?

WK: There are a number of moments that really stand out because of the emotional impact. I think the first wave, and having kids in hockey playoffs, and schools and the activities surrounding that being [abruptly] cancelled. I think of the multiple crises at Maples and Parkview Place, and the seniors that passed away. I think we all had the experience of the first person we knew who passed away from COVID, whether it was family or friend. I also remember the first-time hearing of a child dying from COVID, that was very impactful for me, a child less than 10-years old. But I think one of the events that stayed with me a few years later was the death of Krystal Mousseau. This was a woman, a mom, who passed away when there was an attempt to transport her out of the Brandon ICU, an attempt to move her out-of-province during the third wave [of COVID]. I think that was a very significant moment in our province's history, even if it is not necessarily understood as such. This was someone who very possibly could still be alive if it was not for the confluence of a few decisions made by government. You had the privatization of Lifeflight Air Ambulances,[85] you had the decisions to cut ICU capacity, and you had the decisions to ignore public health advice coming from physicians who were recommending that the

[85] Lifeflight Air Ambulance: Lifeflight Air Ambulance Services is a program that was developed in 1985 and provides inter-facility air ambulance transport for critically ill or injured Manitobans from areas outside a 200-kilometre radius of Winnipeg.

government act to stem the rise of cases [of COVID] in the third wave. Each of those, I don't think we can say is entirely responsible for the situation, but each of them was contributing factors. While we can't definitely point the finger, I do think we can legitimately question whether that specific person would still be alive today had different public policy decisions been made. I am sure there are many other cases throughout the pandemic where we are left with those questions, but in my mind that one really stood out because it is a very specific example, where specific Manitoba public policy decisions contributed to the situation in which one of our own passed away. And I think that is one of the things that I remember on a personal level, not just because of the public policy implications, but also because it is a parent, a sister, a mom, so it definitely has an emotional dimension as well. On a personal level, that was definitely a significant moment in my view. And on the more positive side, I remember going to get my wife [to get vaccinated]. Because she works in healthcare, she was able to get vaccinated before us. When I was able to get vaccinated, and when I was able to take my mom to get vaccinated, because she lives with us most of the time, and when I was able to take the kids to go get vaccinated, I remember that being a significant moment where I thought, "okay, we are moving on from this difficult period." It didn't end up being the end, we went through many more ups and downs after that, but I do remember when the vaccine roll-out became a reality, this feeling of, "okay, we are starting to move into a different phase of this thing, perhaps for the better."

DLM: There was an emotional lift to that, a sense of, "we can deal with this somehow", rather than just sitting in your house. No matter how rich you are, a closed door is always a prison if you can't open it again.

WK: We all sacrificed. Some people gave the ultimate sacrifice. If you were a senior who was not able to be there for the celebration, or a kid who missed a graduation, or an adult who went through this period of your life. We all made sacrifices, and to me, the vaccination roll out was a time where we started to recognize that maybe we were moving on. Obviously, that was not the end, there was much more to come after that, but it was a turning point. And I felt that emotionally. I'm sure many of us did too.

BPS: Thank you so much again for helping us. Thank you Wab.

WK: Can I add one more point? It is a small point, but I think it is relevant, I just want to make a quick point which is, during the pandemic the Legislature added the option to sit virtually, right? This was because of distancing and capacity limits. Those were temporary rules, and they may go by the wayside now that we are moving on, and the pandemic is over according to WHO and the general public. Everyone wants this thing to be over, but I would hope that we do think about keeping these options around. The option of sitting virtually could potentially make politics more inclusive going forward. Right now, an MLA has a very unique employment status. We do not punch timecards, and as a result we do not get maternity leave or paternity leave, or things like that. But I think if we keep the option to sit virtually, perhaps we can encourage more moms, or people that want to be moms, or dads, or parents who are in that period of their lives, younger people, people of different genders to join politics with that flexibility. I am somebody who had an addition to our family since I have been elected to public office, and it's a real balancing act. Since there is no maternity or paternity leave for MLAs, if you gave MLAs the ability to sit virtually and manage the work-life situation, I think it could help expand the tent, it could make politics more inclusive, and ultimately, it's better for everyone, regardless of party when we are able to draw on a larger pool of people to serve in the Legislature. That's one that I would make a strong argument for, as an innovation during COVID that happened out of necessity that could continue. Maybe there are other examples, but that is one that is important to me, so I wanted to make that point before we concluded.

BPS: Thank you. That was a question that we were asking when we did a survey in the profession: What temporary innovation occurred out of necessity during COVID that we should be keeping permanently? In Manitoba, particularly, there are some serious issues about people living in northern ridings, I had a conversation once with Elijah Harper about the physical demands of representing a northern Manitoba riding in the House of Commons. It is hard to imagine the demands and difficulty of physically appearing within a large constituency. It's not just booking one flight on Air Canada to Toronto. Going to communities that are hundreds of kilometres away, it may not always be easy for people who live in the city to appreciate the travel demands in Manitoba that are required in order to do the job. Anyway, thank you so much for your time and conversation. Very grateful that you were able to spare us the time.

WK: Thank you very much, and I enjoyed this as well.