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**TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF CANADA  
Transcript of ABNE202 - Honorary Witness Reflection of  
Wab Kinew, Day 2 of the Alberta National Event, 28  
March 2014**

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Note: This draft transcript is for research use only and has  
not been verified.

1                   **[transcription starts at 02:25:04]**

2                   **Male:** -our final honorary witness of the  
3                   day. I feel like I should rap. But I was much  
4                   more of a Cree dance guy myself so. [laughter]  
5                   I'm really honoured to be a-inviting this speaker  
6                   up because I've followed-he's an inspiration to  
7                   all us young people. So it gives me great  
8                   pleasure to call up Wab Kinew. [cheering,  
9                   applause]

10                  **Wab Kinew:** [speaking in aboriginal language]  
11                  To my Dakota, Lakota, Nakota relatives-I say  
12                  [speaking in aboriginal language]. So that's two  
13                  indigenous languages down, 60 more to go.  
14                  [laughter, applause] You know, all day, people  
15                  have been asking me-what's in the bag. As I walk  
16                  around here, listening to the stories of  
17                  survivors, sitting in on the panels. It's a  
18                  chanupa, a pohagen, a **spagen (sp)**. It's a  
19                  ceremonial pipe. A sacred pipe. Which when you  
20                  bind the two sides together, the stem and the  
21                  bowl-it offers us a model of reconciliation. Of  
22                  two forces coming together to be more powerful  
23                  than they were otherwise. [applause] So it's

1 important for me to come up here before you all  
2 and to speak Anishnaabemowin. And a little bit of  
3 Lakota. And to carry a pipe. Because it sends a  
4 message. It sends a message to those who designed  
5 the residential school system, that you have  
6 failed. You have failed. [applause, cheering] We  
7 were abused. Our languages were assaulted. Our  
8 families were harmed, in some cases irreparably.  
9 But we are still here. [applause, cheering] We  
10 are still here. [drum sounding, whistling] So in  
11 honour of my late father, Tobasonakwitubun (sp),  
12 a survivor of Saint Mary's residential school in  
13 Rat Portage, Ontario, I wanted to say that. I so  
14 wish that he could've seen this. The final day.  
15 The final event. Of the Truth and Reconciliation  
16 Commission. So that he could see how this country  
17 has changed. And when he was a child, he was told  
18 that he was a savage. He was told that he was  
19 nothing. He was assaulted, taken away from his  
20 family. Taken away from his father's trap line.  
21 And to see the change that has happened, where  
22 today, in Canada, there are tens of thousands of  
23 people from all walks of life, gathering together

1 to set that right and to stand up for justice for  
2 indigenous people. [applause] When he was a  
3 child, education was a tool of assimilation. The  
4 expressed intent was to kill the Indian in him.  
5 Today, his daughter, my younger sister Shawin  
6 (Sp), is on full academic scholarship at Harvard  
7 University, the greatest educational institution  
8 on earth. [applause, whistling] But before she  
9 went to Harvard, she went to the sun dance. The  
10 world has changed in another way as well. The old  
11 binary, the old dichotomy of white people versus  
12 Indians no longer applies. Look around at Canada  
13 today. Yes, there are the descendents of  
14 Europeans, yes, there are the descendents of  
15 indigenous people. But there are also the  
16 descendents of Arab nations, of Iran, of the  
17 Slovak nations, of Africa, of the Caribbean,  
18 south east Asians, Chinese, Japanese. The  
19 challenge of reconciliation may have begun  
20 between indigenous peoples and Europeans, but now  
21 the project of reconciliation will be undertaken  
22 by the children of all those nations whom I just  
23 mentioned. [applause] And though the world has

1 changed, Canada has changed, we still have a  
2 long way to go. First Nations children get 35  
3 hundred dollars to four thousand dollars less per  
4 student, per year, to pay for their educations  
5 because of systemic, institutional racism that  
6 still exists in this country. [applause] Our own  
7 modern day saint—Sydney Blackstock [applause]  
8 reminds us that there are still tens of thousands  
9 of indigenous children in the child welfare  
10 system. And there are 825 documented missing and  
11 murdered indigenous women. These are the legacies  
12 of the residential school system. [applause] We  
13 cannot just commit to reconciliation for the  
14 past. We must look at the children whose images  
15 we have been watching these past few days. The  
16 growing images of the survivors whose stories  
17 we've heard these past hours, minutes. And say  
18 that I wasn't able to stand up for you in the  
19 past. But I will stand up for those children who  
20 are in the same boat today. And that is a project  
21 to which we must all commit together. [applause]  
22 But I think the most profound thing that I heard  
23 today was from survivor Barney Williams, and it's

1       so profound because it's so simple. He said--don't  
2       forget the survivors. Don't forget the survivors.  
3       And so, what I've heard from survivors today--  
4       Chief [inaudible - 02:32:23] Lakes, speaking  
5       about her grandfather who took his own life  
6       because of the pain of residential schools, I  
7       made a new friend. Another survivor, Faye, who  
8       told a very painful story of sexual abuse but  
9       then lightened up when she said--even though my  
10      great grandparents went to residential schools,  
11      my grandparents went to residential schools, my  
12      parents went to residential schools, and I went  
13      to a residential school. I am the first person,  
14      in living memory, in my family to raise my own  
15      children. [applause] And so finally I will  
16      remember my late father. He gave his statement at  
17      the first national event in Winnipeg. And now, to  
18      the bentwood box, and for the record of the TRC,  
19      I will share the story of what he undertook  
20      after. Telling his story of being a survivor and  
21      experiencing all the horror stories of which you  
22      have heard. Rather than wallowing in anger or  
23      self pity, he rose up and he adopted the

1       archbishop of Manitoba as his brother. A  
2       traditional ceremony in which he commits to take  
3       him as kin and to work things out through thick  
4       and through thin. And following that, we traveled  
5       together to the Vatican. Commissioner Littlechild  
6       was there. To witness a canonisation of Saint  
7       [inaudible - 02:34:06]. [applause, cheering] And  
8       I was such—it was such a proud day to watch my  
9       father there. Sitting on the roof of the Vatican.  
10      Smiling. Grinning from ear to ear. Because it  
11      represented his life coming full circle. From  
12      being told that he was a savage as a child. To as  
13      an elder, seeing the religion of his tormentors  
14      lift somebody like him up to their greatest  
15      heights. And that was a powerful day. He passed  
16      away about three months after that. But before  
17      that happened, he lay in a darkened room and he  
18      asked for the arch bishop to come. And of course,  
19      my father didn't have much strength left at that  
20      point, wasn't speaking at all. So the arch bishop  
21      said a prayer on his behalf. When he stood up to  
22      leave, in a throwaway comment, he said, pray for  
23      me too. And suddenly, my father's life returned

1 to him. He reached out and he said [speaking  
2 aboriginal language]. And he said a prayer in our  
3 Anishnaabe language. And so the re—and so the  
4 road to reconciliation is a long one. It's a  
5 political one. It's a social one. But we ought  
6 never forget that at its core, it is a spiritual  
7 one. And so in as much—as we want to remember the  
8 survivors of Indian residential schools, as an  
9 honorary witness here today, I am committed to  
10 listening to them and to hearing their stories  
11 for as long as they want to tell them. And I am  
12 committing to keeping the memory, the living  
13 memory of their stories and their experiences  
14 alive for the rest of my life. [applause] And if  
15 I can make a suggestion, a recommendation. It is  
16 that we establish a national day—a statutory  
17 holiday, in remembrance of the survivors of  
18 Indian residential schools. [applause] And that  
19 we spend that day, every year, hearing their  
20 stories again. Reminding ourselves of what  
21 happened here in these lands. And committing to  
22 never letting them happen again. [cheering,  
23 applause] So those are the commitments that I'm



1 making. And I know many other people are  
2 undertaking similar commitments today. What I  
3 would tell you is this—bearing in mind the  
4 spiritual nature of this journey that we are on  
5 together, there is not a red race and a white  
6 race. There is not a black race and a brown race.  
7 There is one race. The human race. And we are all  
8 in this together. [cheering, applause, drum  
9 sounding] And let us commit to removing the  
10 political, economic, and social barriers which  
11 prevent the full realization of that vision in  
12 these lands. And let us raise up the residential  
13 school survivors and their example of courage,  
14 grace, and compassion as the examples in whose  
15 footsteps we walk towards that brighter day.  
16 [speaking in aboriginal language] [applause, drum  
17 sounding, whistling]

18 **Male:** Thank you, Wab Kinew, for those  
19 amazing, inspiring words.

20 **[end of transcription segment at 02:38:52]**