

An Interview with Rana Bokhari, Liberal Party Leader†

R A N A B O K H A R I *

BPS: How did you end up in law school?

RB: Well I spent most of my life as a farmer. My family had a large chicken farm in Anola, so for much of my life, my day to day was filled with gathering eggs and feeding chickens and other work in the barns. As a young girl, I wanted to be a doctor and my parents were encouraging me to do so. As I got older I realized that medicine wasn't for me. It was too sterile, too dry, and it didn't fit my personality at all. I admire anyone in the profession but it was not my calling. In my late teens, early twenties I went through a very creative phase, I started designing clothes. I had no formal fashion design education but I loved tearing things apart and putting them back together, it was just this quirk I had. At that point, my dad who was a business man and a wonderful supportive male role model in my life, encouraged my creativity, but felt I needed a solid educational foundation. I went back to university when I was 28 years old, and with the encouragement of my parents I made the decision I was going to go to law school. And after a degree in Psychology, a degree in Criminology, my pre-Masters in Criminology, I got into law school at Robson Hall, University of Manitoba.

BPS: Did you do it because you saw a career as a lawyer or because you already had some intimation about a career in politics?

RB: I went into law as a stepping stone to public service. Anyone who knew me during law school could see that as passionate as I was about

† This interview was conducted by Bryan P. Schwartz in July 2014.

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the practice of law, (to be clear, I am a strong advocate of practical legal education) it was pretty clear that it was outside my personality to solely practice law. I was more about moving people and getting people engaged. I have always been about serving people. During law school, I lead several initiatives to get the student body rallied about some issue or some cause, because I knew that I could, I am able to get people together and passionate about a cause. University, specifically Robson Hall was where I started all my fundraising initiatives, that is where I said, "Ok I want the student body to give back to the community". That is why I was so passionate about organizing events for the student body because I was just itching to give back in some way.

I think my calling to public service stems from how grateful I am, I'm so thankful for my family being here, for the fact I was raised the way I was, for being first generation Canadian, I am the first female lawyer in the family, the first politician in the family, and as first generation family I'm just grateful for what this province has given me. For me it will always about giving back and politics is the vehicle I've chosen to do that.

BPS: Coming up to the 100th Anniversary of the law school, we are doing a special issue interviewing people who were there during the great transition in the 1960s. The transition was moving from practitioner-oriented legal education to academic. For example, the Manitoba Law School locates itself on the university campus, and since then in many ways it has increasingly identified itself as an academic institution that teaches law instead of a practitioner-oriented place. Now there is a lot of pressure to go in the opposite direction. You probably know that in Ontario the system cannot handle the sheer number of applicants and has had to develop alternative routes to practice. So did you have a sense of those tensions of law as an academic pursuit and law as a profession, and how did those play out in the law school?

RB: Great question. First year law I was student representative for my section, second year I was Manitoba Bar Association representative, and in third year I was president of the Manitoba Law Student Association (MLSA). I made it a point to be very involved in what was happening in terms of the direction of the practice of law in that school. It is interesting walking out and realizing how accurate our student body's vision was about where the school was going. In all the different positions I've held, especially as president, I was pushing to make sure

that the faculty members and the Bar understood that those students coming into law school need to be trained as professional practical lawyers. It is my opinion that we are doing a huge disservice to the public if we do not do that. Students who do not have basic knowledge, basic practical legal skills cannot provide the public with competent and efficient service, number one. Number two, I respect and admire those who chose an academic field of law, the facts are that the *majority* of student who are in law school want to practice. Now understanding that those practical skills are critical for the majority of students, it's very difficult when the structure available to students to attain those skills is eroding or not available. The greatest challenge the profession of law in Manitoba could face is we get off the track of promoting and delivering practical legal education. Respect it, admire it, encourage research but the focus has to be practical skills because our job as lawyers is public service. We are public servants and people rely on us to do a job. Clients spend a lot of money and expect high levels of service and knowledge to be delivered in the most efficient manner. It is my fear as we progress more into this push and pull between academic and practical that somehow we are going to lose the vision which was and should truly be training lawyers with practical skills—that's what Robson Hall should be known for.

BPS: Let's break that down operationally. Robson Hall was unique curriculum philosophy in that it had three streams that students take concurrently. There is a doctrinal stream in that unlike most law schools we require students to take a reasonable number of courses after first year. We require students take Family Law, Corporations, Evidence, Tax, and Trusts. From your perspective as a student then and as someone who practiced law, do we have the right balance between student choice and mandatory?

RB: Absolutely. As much as we may have complained about it at the time (during law school), the value of those courses....well they proved to be invaluable. Those core mandatory classes are one of the greatest assets and foundational tools that our faculty provided. Those courses gave us a strong understanding of the big picture approach of law. There are no cookie cutter clients, clients who says "this is my family problem, solve this individual problem" may not be aware of the tax issues, maybe an estate issue, possible a criminal issue. There will be multiple issues for that one client, that the lawyer has to be able to recognize. Now, That does not mean that a family lawyer will have to

go and solve *all* those issues for that person, but lawyers do need to be able to recognize that those problems exist. I can assure you, those mandatory classes are an asset.

BPS: We have clinical, skills-based component every year. There is talk about expanding that, people are now calling experiential learning. Are we offering enough in that area? Should we be putting more resources into that area?

RB: Going back to my own experience it was difficult to get into those courses. There were some courses that you gained some skills through, Art of the Deal was one of them. We would go with Professor Pozios to firms and draft documents – sales agreements and whatnot. I remember calling Professor Pozios first month practicing and telling him how much those skills helped me in practice. Regarding resources, I would strongly encourage hiring faculty members who are trained and have practiced as lawyers. The reality of the situation is, that students want to know their professor has practiced corporate law for decades so that he/she can instruct them on the nuances, the hooks to look for in the contract for example. They need to know what to look for, the only person who can tell them what to look for is an experienced practitioner, someone who has learned from experience and now can teach students what they have learned. Encouraging lawyers to teach as as sessional instructors is a start. Students need and pay thousands of dollars for legal training; this is lost at times, in the bureaucracy of it all. Teach them how to save client's money, teach them how to be the best practicing lawyers they can be. Spend time going through contracts, and custody agreements, and sale and purchase agreements, teach them what tax issues arise during a basic real estate deal...integrate all aspects of law in a balanced way, and we will produce the best lawyers. But, I guess I am a liberal so I'm all about balance.

BPS: My view is the best instruction is integrated, teaching the doctrinal, the practical, and some philosophical perspectives. Different views taught can be ways to think about issues. Do we do an adequate job to raise these different types of philosophical questions? Is there an advantage to having academics introduce these issues?

RB: Yes there is an advantage... It is important to be creative with how these courses are taught to students. Maybe if it is a year-long

course we split between two instructors, one lawyer, one philosophical etc. The method of teaching cannot be an all or nothing. That is why I started this discussion by stating that I value the theoretical component, I understand it enhances critical thinking. But it cannot be all or nothing. For some reason, maybe it is a habit of human nature that everyone wants to push to one side or the other, but I know that there is a fair middle ground. That centre is what we should aspire towards.

BPS: Let me ask you about that centre in another dimension. There is first the balance between critical and practical skills. Another dimension is the diversity of thought. We have some courses that are inherently political – constitutional law, family law, and to some extent criminal law. Tax can also be very political. You are someone who is obviously very political both as someone who is interested in the societal problems of politics and the partisan aspect. Does your law school experience give you that exposure to the reasonable range of thought or is there an orthodoxy being taught?

RB: It's interesting to me in a lot of ways because I did not create political opinion in law school. I did not fall on one end of the spectrum or another through law school. I actually did that during my criminology and psychology degrees. Walking into law school I was pretty aware of where I fell on that spectrum of politics. I knew where my 'ideology' aligned with. I knew what I believed in. I didn't form political opinions in law school. I do not think that in terms of a curriculum I was able to shape an ideological opinion. But to be frank - I'm not a very ideological person; I'm more focused on good ideas based on facts and evidence.

BPS: In the sense, that it was not discussed?

RB: Thinking back I truthfully cannot remember - other than Legislative Process in which we closely analyzed the Legislative proceedings, had speakers come in who were current MLAs. I did not recall dialogue in the classroom setting about politics. That is quite interesting considering the number of students who were politically active at the time.

BPS: This surprises me a bit but makes it especially interesting. I thought that there was a very strong movement in Canadian academia

for people to see law as the pursuit of politics by other means. Some academics have very strong political leanings.

RB: Obviously we always consider the policy impact, in class we discussed that but I do not recall taking the conversation one step further. We spoke about Manitoba law and legislation but never about the evolution of law in the political climate. The reality is that they do go hand in hand, they are so completely intertwined, which makes it such a smooth transition from law to politics because in your mind it is all policy. Law is about legislation being created for a particular policy outcome.

BPS: We are not really having a discussion at the higher level about the policy. We have a discussion about what the policy is but we are not having a critical discussion about it. For example in tax we do not discuss whether the system should be used for redistribution or to encourage certain objections. There is no right or wrong answer but there is many different perspectives.

RB: I think professors have a great opportunity they have the next generation of leaders in front of them, to teach them but also to have conversations about our political atmosphere with them in an objective manner. At times, there is a missed opportunity to engage and encourage a discussion about where young adults stand politically and where they want to see the province go. I graduated with some brilliant minds, those are the people we want to be having those conversations with and encouraging discussion from. I believe that the faculty and the school itself could learn so much just by listening to our younger generation. They are the next generation of leaders: utilize the opportunity to listen to them.

BPS: Having more conversations about these different philosophies?

RB: Yes, different philosophies, issues, life experiences, dialogue about change. There are few things that worked yesterday, that do not need to be altered in some way to work today. The fear of moving ahead or the desire to maintain the status quo will eventually lead to repression of thought and innovation. That is in essence what we see today in Manitoba politics, the fear of moving forward, to thrive, to grow, to allow people to use their skills and thought processes, even if they don't

agree with yours. If you really listen to people, it is amazing how much you learn. It can no longer just be about regurgitating information...

BPS: Let me ask you a little bit about the regurgitation phenomenon. Before law school there seems to be a lot of anti-educational practices. The reality is that it takes a staggeringly high GPA to get into law school. In order to achieve that GPA it is probably not a good idea to take a lot of advanced courses in philosophy or English literature. It discourages students from going outside their comfort zone. I see fewer students with backgrounds in philosophy or literature. Am I right about that, is there a diminishing sense that students can pursue the life of the mind before law school?

RB: Great question! My story is very different because I powered through two degrees to get into law school. But for a lot of people, especially the younger students, they are taking courses that are easy As and that allow time for preparing for the LSAT. Now as a student, where does that leave you? Are you expanding your mind? No. Are you learning about critical societal issues by taking detailed sociology, or environmental classes? No, because you don't take those courses. At that point in time, in the pre-entry phase, these students are not thinking about expanding their knowledge base, they are determined to be as competitive as possible to get into law school. The other side of that coin is - they need to do this by spending the least amount of money and taking courses that will leave enough time to study for the LSAT, while maintaining a high GPA. Admissions does discourage people from expanding their horizons, I saw this happen to others, of course I was older so I was in a different place in life.

BPS: That has been my hypothesis. I find in law school people come from an environment where you need to be very academically materialist. In law school, you are faced with a very difficult job market. I do not know how much the faculty appreciates that, but students are very sensitive to it. Now students are in a classroom and want to know exactly what is on the exam in order to get a good grade. Having that good grade affects you materially. Having Schwartz stand up there in one of his digressions into literature and the meaning of life is irritating. That is my sense as a professor, is that consistent with your own experience?

RB: It can vary with the demands on your time. It does change as you go through school; during first year, you feel pressure to read every case, by third year you know how to pinpoint the important information. Again it is unfortunately the sad state of education that we as are so hooked on the idea that As are going to get you the job. I would argue if I was hiring someone, I think grades would matter in terms of how competent someone is in law, but your life experiences meshed together with your competency in law is what makes you a phenomenal lawyer.

Generally across our education system has gotten off track. Learning should be so much broader. The fact that learning has become “I’m going to give you a book, you are going to read it and be tested on it” does not reflect the current job market.

BPS: My own view is that market of the day has greatly increased what lawyers always were, creative problem solvers.

RB: Creative, keyword.

BPS: It could be that a lawyer some time ago would spend part of their day doing real estate conveyance. That takes a particular skill. But now technology and paralegals have changed that. What lawyers are paid for is the ability to take any human problem with multiple dimensions is to come up with a unique solution. The ideal lawyer needs to be skilled in the mechanics but also needs the combination of critical thinking, open mindedness, willing to learn new things, see all the dimensions of a problem, and find some way to solve it. Students are basically taught with the case law method that the first resort is make a legal argument, if that does not work go to court. But that is just one solution. To be successful in solving problems, there is a premium on creativity.

RB: We should always be looking for and encouraging those creative minds, in politics as well. What law needs and what this province needs is some proactive thinking, in 2014 there are people who are able to do the same jobs creatively and by being innovated. In terms of law that may mean keeping people out of court, and finding innovative ways to cut the cost for their client. If Politicians and lawyers do not recognize that their job is to serve the public, well that’s the first problem. Our job is to efficiently and in the best way, with the best outcome possible give clients (in my case my province) the solution to their problem. Or

if we cannot give them the solution, guide them to that place where can find the solution. It is the same thing for politics. We are stuck in a rut, it's time for a new generation of people to make changes.

I want to do politics differently. The challenge is trying to change direction – the structure is set up to support the status quo not change. There are hurdles to overcome to get your voice heard. As a leader, I've accepted that challenge. I hope Manitobans recognize that we are trying to build a new party founded on pillars of ethics, accountability, transparency, financial, social and environmental responsibility. I am really not into the old school kind of political game. When everyone else is bickering back and forth, I want to go and talk to regular people in church basements and coffee shops. The current political game is hindering the growth of our Province, but with a new generation of leadership we can overcome this current state. Right now in Manitoba, we are just stagnant. The next election is a pivotal moment in Manitoba. Our province needs a reasonable voice in the Legislature; to rid our future of this toxic political rhetoric. The Manitoba Liberal Party under my leadership is dedicated to representing Manitobans with a solution based and practical voice.

BPS: The ideology of the academia has gone through several iterations. I want to discuss your own generational experience. My sense is that academics are on the cutting edge of 20 or 30 years ago. We grow up and learn at the feet of the masters before us. There was a certain Marxian tendency in the academy, the generation I am associated with viewed the world as being divided by gender and ethnicity grounds. I am guessing that your generation does not view the world that way. Could you speak to that?

RB: We are not a generation that is hung up on race, gender, etc. I have young women ask me questions about what it's "really" like to be Leader. I give them the good and the bad. I tell openly tell them about my experience and they appreciate the honesty. I can look back and say that I have had some unique battles because I am a woman. I have been treated in certain ways because I am a minority woman, but at the end of the day as a leader, those things are my personal battles, my job is to break down barriers so it's easier for the women to come after me, just like those before me broke down SO many barriers...I cannot focus on these things, but I am open to sharing them with young women who ask me about them. Someday, I will write about them I'm sure. My goal today is providing Manitobans with a political option, I am excited the

party is growing, I believe that our province needs a third party in the Legislature.

BPS: Traditional debate in politics is the role of the individual and the role of the government. Your generation seems to me to have a necessary anti-corporatist attitude by which I mean forty years ago our economy was based on the large corporation. Nowadays less people will spend their entire career working for big organizations, more people are consultants or run their own businesses. Your generation seems to be more attuned this, and has a willingness to create their own career.

RB: I think it is more about selling and marketing ourselves. We are a generation that is trying to make it, in this unknown territory: our globalized world. We are forced to compete in this world without boundaries, so we do that by selling and marketing ourselves as the very best in field X. Our generation and probably three generations to come will and are facing very unique challenges - we must learn to sell market, and branding ourselves. There was a time where the only sales people you came across were the car salesman or guys going door to door selling brushes or something....today everything is sales. It has been a very organic shift, it used to be, "I am Rana. I have a job, I'm x years out of law school, I work at a large firm. I will stay at that job, hoping to retire by 65." That is not a normal career anymore. Today, we are not competing only within Manitoba but with the entire world. We have to sell our resourcefulness, our skills, our unique qualities, our innovative minds, our creativity. For Manitoba this is a challenge because innovation and creativity is not valued. We have people boxed into these little roles-where the actual global market is demanding the exact opposite from us. There will be a clash, I can see it, that is going to be the greatest challenge of our time. The fact that government is not being proactive acknowledging the shifts in the world is going to cause this clash. Look around, how many Lawyer's are consulting on the side, how many doctors are now starting other businesses. The other shift we will see is self-employed, and independent contractor situations, where the norm was 9-5 jobs. If our Provincial and federal government do not start planning for these changes we will continue to see MB lag behind other provinces. The Manitoba Liberal party has a vision and a plan that recognizes our generational changes.

BPS: That seems to me to be the greatest irony in education. A lot of education now seems to be very outcome driven but you have a generation that wants flexibility of the mind. There is a double message: to be successful in education you need to be able to reproduce facts but life demands resourcefulness and innovation. Those two messages are not consistent.

RB: You're right they are not. People would ask me why I want to lead a third party with less resources, less structure than the others, etc. etc. but think about it...I get to completely rebuild something that is modern and representative of our real world. It at times feels like a political start-up. It is the most amazing challenge. I am so grateful to be at the lead of it. There are so many serious issues that need to be addressed in this province. Career politicians want to use same old same old approaches. I don't want to use the same approaches. In my view, we do can what we has been done all along and frankly did not work or we can recognize that the future generations are/will be different and we are not catering to their needs at all. If we continue to stifle and stop these brilliant minds from expanding and producing in Manitoba, well they will just go somewhere else.... We need change and Manitobans have an appetite for change right now.

BPS: We have a tendency in this province to believe that a government program solves all problems. Maybe the question is not whether we have the right program but whether a government program is even the right solution at all. We have very stultified, government-driven system.

RB: I've noticed that there is this unwritten rule in politics that discourages politicians from simply stating when they don't know something. We need to be honest with the people of our province; it is okay as a leader to say I do not know what the best solution is... but I have a vision and I know if I ask the right people we can make that vision a reality. We do not have to have our hands in everything. We have to allow people to grow. Maybe that is the problem: we do not allow people to just succeed in what they are good at. The government is not the expert in everything. It is okay, to allow people with expertise in an area to control it and allow it to grow with government oversight.

I keep wanting to talk about the generational issue. I really need an answer from this government: What is the ultimate plan for the next generation?

BPS: Make them pay off the debt?

RB: We have to pay off this government's debt (wasted money - let's call a spade a spade... let's call it what it is fourteen years of financial mismanagement). We had no say in producing it, it really hasn't helped us — I hear from Manitobans all the time, we pay but don't see any increase in our standards of education, health, infrastructure, families are still suffering. The result is the outward migration of youth, which in my opinion can be stopped if it becomes one of the priorities of Manitoba, not just an afterthought.

BPS: It is a paradox for me. As a talented young person stunted by the government policies I just leave. I don't stay and vote against the current policy, I just choose to leave. That seems to work against change in the province.

RB: I'm very concerned about this. The necessary first step would be for government to step back and recognize it is a problem. Unfortunately, this government's natural reaction is to ignore and cover up, spend money and pretend that throwing money at everything is the solution to everything.

BPS: One of the ways we have dealt with outward migration is tax breaks on those who were educated in the province. Well that ensures other people pay more taxes and it seems to be an unrealistic calculation. Ten percent more in income tax is not made up through tuition rebates.

RB: No it's not. But there are other ways to deal with outward migration, let's start to support young entrepreneurs for one. People come to us saying they are closing their small business because of excessive regulations, the PST has not helped at all, there are no incentives to stay in business here. We need to deal with student debt head on, we need to acknowledge that it's very difficult for young people to purchase homes in Winnipeg. We are the centre of this country and we have hydro power. We can be the most innovative of

any province because we have those two assets. We could be the hub of any industry.

BPS: Frankly, your generation is not making a lot of noise about the debt; your generation is not making a lot of noise about the economically and environmentally destructive approach to hydro; your generation is not speaking out about the wait times in hospitals. With the rise of social media the theory is everyone can message, but that does not seem to be happening. How do you as a leader find a point of contact when everyone is able to put out messages and selectively receive their messages? Why is your generation not speaking about these problems?

RB: I think it's a very circular issue. We do have a generation that to some extent is disengaged in politics. They will continue to be disengaged so long as the dialogue in the Legislature and the public is so negative. What young people want to see is hope and opportunity. The conversations they want to hear from us are that this province can offer us opportunities. Just changing the narrative would engage more people. Secondly, who is talking about us? I do not hear anything about young people, other than the fact that they are disengaged... is that really the *ONLY* thing to talk about when it comes to youth, young adults? Maybe, if politicians started talking about things that were *relevant* for my generation more of them would be involved.

BPS: I guess sometimes the system tries to buy you off cheap, for example tuition, first a freeze then capped at inflation. I guess it was a sound political calculation.

RB: At the same time, again—is tuition that *ONLY* thing that matters to my generation? Of Course not! There are people who are not in school, to whom tuition does not matter. To be frank...politicians have not been speaking with this generation and now that same group has not speaking back. But, it will change. As a party we are committed to helping make that change. There needs to be a reasonable, sensible, non-negative approach, I'm very encouraged by the amount of young people the MLP is starting to pull in and I am listening to them.

BPS: Suppose that is your message. How do you get any kind of presence, purchase with public opinion when competing with 200 channels? You can do all the Facebook postings you want, use the

Legislature but there does not seem to be a lot of resonance. The mechanics of our system do not give you a whole lot of resources to work with, how do you get your message out to a very distracted and fragmented public?

RB: Grassroots, word of mouth. I do what I love doing, which is going to groups of people talking with them and listening. I love the grassroots approach to politics; it's the part I get excited about every single day. We recognized early on that we have to work on social media such as Twitter and Facebook as a way of spreading our message but the real engagement comes from one-on-one relationships. I am out having conversations with voters all over Manitoba. We are bringing grassroots, retail politics back...

BPS: Have you received feedback that you are making headway?

RB: Yes, I think Morris and Arthur-Virden bi-elections were perfect examples of that.

BPS: Liberals went from a distant third to a close second in Arthur-Virden correct? That was all retail, very limited resources?

RB: Exactly, at that time I had just been elected as leader. We had just started our transition, had not done any major fundraising at the time the election was called. We went out and spoke to people, Manitobans want change, there is no doubt about that. I have been very realistic, I am very aware of the political environment that I am in, as a party we are making decisions based on evidence. It is no secret that we don't have the funding the other's parties have so that can pose some challenges, but we are overcoming them by sticking to our plan of focusing on our ground game and grass roots politics.

BPS: You mentioned fundraising, do you feel the rules are fair in terms of opposition parties raising money to get their message out? Should there be higher ceilings on individual contributions or more public funding?

RB: Do I think it should be more public funding? No, I just do not think that political fundraising battles should be a bill to someone else. I do think the way political fundraising works at this time-precludes young people from being able to contribute. Many of our donors are

young professionals just starting out in their careers, they don't have a lot of disposable income. So, again the current structure is discouraging to young people who want to contribute but cannot engage in the normal fundraising structure set up. We try not to plan \$100 fundraising events etc, so we can be more inclusive.

When young people send \$20 for a donation they are really buying into the party, that 20 dollars is coming out of a very tight budget. It shows their belief in that party.

BPS: I suppose older people have the money and time to spend. Younger people have less money and less time, being busy with school, early in their careers and family. It is a double negative. You cannot buy your way in and you may have very limited time to work your way in. It does seem to explain the disengagement of young people.

RB: It is not as though, like I said before that young people do not care. It is frustrating to hear people say we are apathetic. We are not apathetic, but frankly none of us are in positions to choose donating to a political party above, paying a mortgage, or for childcare, or spending money to take care of our parents, with an income that is not competitive nationally, with the highest amount of personal and government debt in decades. This is a generation that not only is taking care of their own children but also parents, with minimal resources. It's not about caring, it's about the situation that we find ourselves in.

BPS: In terms of getting into the traditional media, is that something you find difficult as a third party leader?

RB: It is just a cycle, the media picks and chooses when they feel like listening. Generally speaking they have been fair in the representation of the MLP. I'm sure if I started attacking other parties that will get me in the paper. But if I stand my ground and stick to my beliefs of positive politics the challenge will likely continue, we all know, if it bleeds it leads. But I'm not worried about it, retail politics is the way I spread our message. These are just things that come with the territory. It is in the best interest of all Manitobans to have a reasonable, sensible, steady, calm, intelligent, evidence-based voice somewhere and that is what we are working towards offering Manitobans.

BPS: How important to being that voice is it to having a seat in the Legislature? Is the Legislature a forum that is good for getting your message out there?

RB: Early on not having a seat in the Legislature was less of a challenge...we needed the time to get ourselves organized. Today, a year in, it would really help get our message out if I did have a seat. We use our session time wisely, we work hard to ask questions in the leg. Jon Gerrard and I work closely and we draft the questions together. People are noticing and are becoming aware that the questions are representative of a new Liberal Party vision. I sit up in the gallery during session and really pay attention to the functioning of the Legislature...

BPS: You would not have had very much experience with Legislatures prior to working as a party leader.

RB: No not at all, my initial reaction after my first day in the gallery was not good. I walked in, I sat in the gallery, and it was just the most disturbing narrative. I find the mindless bickering counterproductive and quite honestly, childish... the lack of progress of real issues that affect Manitobans are not being dealt with in a meaningful way.

BPS: Have you ever been to any public committee hearings?

RB: No I have not. I think it is a great way to have people engaged and involved. Any time that you can get people together to voice their concerns is always positive.

BPS: The comparative method is one of the best ways legislation can be created so long as you take the time to see what really works. Regulatory reform could be a good area for a comparative method analysis. At the federal level there is a process for regulation creation that involves public notice, impact analysis, and public comment period. There is no comparable process in this province. Regulations are the source of most policy initiatives in this province but the process is very hidden. There are other public policies that have not been very transparent, like the Hydro Bipole decision made without any public directive. Where is the decision where the NDP government ordered Hydro to put the Bipole on the west side?

RB: That is the problem with layers and layers of bureaucracy. Public boards whether Hydro, Public Utilities etc., need to be non-partisan.

BPS: The Law Commission of Manitoba made a recommendation on how to reduce partisanship in appointments. The kind of responsibilities and impact these boards have makes them vital. There is no screening or qualifications required.

RB: The fact that a particular group appointed them to a position could become a problem. There needs to be a strict process based on qualifications and an independent appointment body.

BPS: People will claim that is process stuff and not that important. But process can really impact the outcome and substance of policy.

RB: Process is very important. It comes down to an accountable, transparent, and efficient government. We need non-partisan, non-bias people in positions... because hopefully then Manitobans can hold these people to account, also an efficient process costs taxpayers less money.

I have been very vocal about the over regulation of our Province. Regulations are a burden on Manitobans. It will be part of our platform. There are provinces that have a three to one plan where for every new regulation enacted, three are repealed. That is something that the Liberal party is looking at. It is not the ultimate solution but it is a good first step towards efficient government.

BPS: Unfortunately, it is the place we are at right now, who do you encourage small business, the government program is the solution. But that is just one more set of paperwork. If you had to go through the process of asking why we are doing things this way, what is the cost we would probably have smarter regulations systems. It would take a few years to complete.

RB: Old school politics demands that politicians make 4 year plans, no long term proactive planning occurs instead these career politicians are just trying to win an election. We as a party have committed to a more proactive long-range thought process. Our party has a vision and this allows us to make long-term goals that we must start working towards. We are the only party today that can come out with reasonable short, mid and long-term goals based on a vision. Manitoba

needs a proactive, innovative long-term vision for this province. We are not just planning for election cycles, we are planning for the future of province.

BPS: The best way to avoid problems of transparency with the PST money was to give it to the municipalities.

RB: Yes! Let's talk about revenue sharing.

BPS: Municipalities have sought a new deal for decades. PST money could have funneled into infrastructure. So let's talk about revenue sharing.

RB: I'll start by saying I'm a farm girl. I take a lot of pride from being from rural Manitoba. I'm discouraged by the fact that there is such a huge divide between rural and urban Manitoba. This kind of divisive thinking stunts the growth of our province.

When it comes to revenue sharing municipalities, the issue is twofold. First, the NDP government has downloaded more responsibilities to municipalities; secondly, they did not include funding to match those responsibilities. There is no transfer of revenue or other sources of revenue to deal with the longstanding infrastructure issues that have arisen from years of financial mismanagement. Municipalities need a long term budget. Municipalities need a three or five year money commitment so they can plan and expand.

BPS: If municipalities have a portion of the PST there is an economic incentive to plan in a way that encourages economic growth.

RB: You will recall my very first policy announcement has been that the Liberal government would direct all the new PST revenue dollars to municipalities on a per capita basis. In my view, municipalities need to know what dollars they have to spend, they are in communities and know what their respective municipalities require. With my plan, municipalities would be able to plan ahead with some sense of security. As someone who grew up in rural Manitoba, I am committed to making sure the voices of municipalities are heard.

BPS: We were talking about student politics. What advice would you give to current student politicians in the law school?

RB: It really is about being fearless and recognizing that you represent not only yourselves but are carrying on from the work from previous councils. People who came before you worked very hard to create the current MLSA structure. I hope that the MLSA are in contact with the Law Society and the Bar to make sure they understand the current situation students are facing. The other thing I would advise is, fight for Manitoba students to stay in Manitoba. If that means that students need to be discussing issues with the Law Society demanding the availability of additional articling positions then that is what needs to be done. I think that the connection to the Law Society and the Bar Association is vital. Law school was one of the best experiences of my life, I learned so much, I made some of my closest friends and I'm proud to be an RH Alum.

BPS: Thank you so much for time.

RB: My pleasure, thank you.