



## NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Winnipeg

Day 3

April 15, 2023

### EVIDENCE

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**Witness 1: Cassandra Schroeder**

Full Day 3 Timestamp: 01:41:00–02:01:14

Source URL: <https://rumble.com/v2idi8y-national-citizens-inquiry-winnipeg-day-3.html>

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**Shawn Buckley**

I'd like to invite our first witness, Cassandra Schroeder.

Cassandra, can I get you to state your full name for the record, spelling your first and last name?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yeah, my full name is Cassandra Jaden Schroeder. Spelling of the first name is C-A-S-S-A-N-D-R-A and Schroeder is S-C-H-R-O-E-D-E-R.

**Shawn Buckley**

Do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you God, today?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

I'll have to just apologize. Earlier, Cassandra showed up, and I was waiting for a lawyer named Cassie Desanda to show up. And I thought Cassandra was the lawyer. So I was walking her through what she needed to do as a lawyer. So I think I probably put her on edge today, and I apologize for that. Now, Cassandra, you have a bachelor in science degree?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yes. I received it at the University of Manitoba.

**Shawn Buckley**

I don't want to name your employer. But basically right now, you are working, kind of treading water, because you're wanting to do something else once it becomes available?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yes, yeah. So right now, I'm just working in the meantime while I apply to other programs.

**Shawn Buckley**

Right. And what you're wanting to do is train to be a naturopathic doctor, is my understanding.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

So now, you made a decision not to get vaccinated.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

Can you share with us how you arrived at that decision.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

So early on in my degree, I was taking a cell bio course. In the course, we were talking about how you could use mRNA at this time. They called it "gene therapy for cancer treatment" in our cancer unit. I just remember hearing about that. Then, when they rolled out the vaccines—that they said they were going to be mRNA—I was like, "Oh, I've heard this before, and it didn't go over well in science, that's why it's not widely used." So immediately, I had some red flags.

**Shawn Buckley**

Right. And my understanding is also, you have high blood pressure and that that's an issue.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

Did you speak to your doctor about that to see if you could get an exemption?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yes. So early on, I started collecting some research on this. I was very skeptical. I really only became a problem, I guess, when I couldn't partake in society with friends in school. So I started collecting some research, presented it to my doctor, and she did agree. As a healthy young adult, you shouldn't need to get this, and there is research against this, and so, she recommended not to. At this time though, she told me she could not write an exemption because of legal things: she'd lose her licence and wouldn't be able to practise medicine.

**Shawn Buckley**

Can I just stop you because I want to make sure that the audience understands what you're saying. So your medical doctor agreed that it would not be medically wise for you to get the vaccine?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

But despite that, she said she couldn't write you an exemption letter or she would lose her licence to practise medicine?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Correct.

**Shawn Buckley**

Okay. Now, you had indicated that you started doing research when some restrictions started on you. Can you tell us how this affected your university? What was happening with the COVID mandates?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Sure. So in 2020, in the winter term, they moved classes online. That's when they had their first recorded cases here in Winnipeg, and so everything was moved online. That summer, obviously things happened with the pandemic. Nothing crazy.

Then in the fall of 2020, we were told, as university students, that it was going to be mandatory masking, and all classes would be online. That was for fall and winter of 2020 and 2021.

And then in the fall of 2021, they started rolling out the vaccines that spring and they mandated all university students to be vaccinated. At this point, the university had said— So we all registered for classes in June and July. Come end of August, they released a statement saying that you had to be vaccinated. And you'd have to have your first dose by mid-October and your second one by the end of November.

**Shawn Buckley**

Can I just pause you? So I think, you were going into your third year

**Cassandra Schroeder**  
I'm going into my fourth.

**Shawn Buckley**  
in 2020, right?

**Cassandra Schroeder**  
In 2020, yes. That was my third.

**Shawn Buckley**  
And you had switched majors to microbiology?

**Cassandra Schroeder**  
Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**  
And in microbiology, there's a heavy lab requirement; you've got to be in the lab quite frequently.

**Cassandra Schroeder**  
hmm-hmm.

**Shawn Buckley**  
Okay. Because that played into things also as it went forward, right?

**Cassandra Schroeder**  
For sure. So I originally was on path to do a biology degree. I didn't quite enjoy the courses at the 4000 level, so I switched to microbio. And with the pandemic, a lot of the labs, if they had the opportunity, they were offered online. But not the ones in microbio that I had to take because they were lab techniques

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that you had to actually practise. And so because of that, I wasn't able to actually participate in them. I actually changed my degree, which kind of changed the trajectory of my future options. Not because I wanted to but because I didn't really have any other choices.

**Shawn Buckley**  
Right. Because my understanding is your plan was, at first, to do a masters in microbiology?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yeah, I was very interested in doing a masters. I did some research work and enjoyed it. Thought that a master's could be an opportunity, but I couldn't because I changed my degree.

**Shawn Buckley**

Right. Just so that people listening to your testimony understand. So had you been able to participate normally in classes, you would have gotten a four-year degree and been able to go on and do a master's in microbiology.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yes, I would have been able to go down that route. But now I can't. I'd have to go back.

**Shawn Buckley**

Right. Okay. So you had to kind of come up with a different plan. What did you decide to do? Because I understand that, at one time, you were actually interested in, then, going into become a medical doctor?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yeah. So I was interested in medicine. I ended up applying to the University of Manitoba. But seeing how everything happened in the pandemic, I was just very appalled with medical ethics. I mean, speaking with my own doctor who said, "I advise you not to, but I actually can't help you with anything."

I couldn't believe or even picture myself practising something like that. So I ended up not going forward with that and applied to naturopathic medicine, instead. I got a seat there, but I still can't attend due to restrictions in the province that the school is in.

**Shawn Buckley**

Okay, so can you share with us more specifically what the restrictions are?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yeah, so I applied to the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine in BC and their clinical requirement—not the school's but provincially—is that you have to be vaccinated to be in a medical clinic, practising as a student, whatever the case may be. If you are employed or a student you have to be vaccinated. And I obviously am not. So I cannot go to that program, and I cannot pursue that opportunity right now.

**Shawn Buckley**

Okay. So that's why you're on hold right now because you still want to become a naturopathic doctor, but the restrictions today, still in April of 2023, are holding you back.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

Okay. Now, I'm curious if you were treated differently at the university because you were unvaccinated?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

For sure. So I actually didn't disclose my status to friends or my colleagues. I had told my boss at the time because I was also employed on campus— That was my only opportunity to be on campus was through work. And so, I had been upfront with my boss, but I hadn't disclosed this to anyone else. I didn't think it was information that anyone, quite frankly, needs to know. But I had a couple friends who I did tell, and they ostracized me. They treated me differently.

Going out to social settings was very different. I had people almost treat me as if I was ill, even though I wasn't. And they all knew I was there, and they were all friends with me before the pandemic. So yeah, that really changed my friend groups, which I think was very difficult. As a young adult, you predominantly look for advice and hang out with peers your age, and to lose all of my friends was very, very hard.

**Shawn Buckley**

Right. And were there any comments by professors or anything like that, that you experienced?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yeah. So in the classes, even though I was taking them online, there were some professors who would still make comments belittling those who were unvaccinated. "I can't believe there's anti-vaxxers." Things like that. "I can't believe that people wouldn't get vaccinated. It's so crazy, make sure you get boosted." It was just crazy. Because I'm taking science courses, but that, quite frankly, has nothing to do with science, has nothing to do with the courses I was taking. It was just kind of a jab at those who chose not to get vaccinated.

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, you told us that you were employed at the university. And my understanding is that in the winter of 2022, you got tested to see whether you caught COVID or not.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yeah. So my thought process was, how do I end up keeping my classes so I can pursue my degree? How do I make sure I can still work so I can pay for all of this? So I asked my doctor if I could get an antibody test done, which, interestingly enough, you cannot get one if you're vaccinated. So I went to my doctor; she agreed. I got the lab work done. It came back positive. So I said, "Hey, can you write me an exemption so that I can go to these classes?" And she said, "The best I can do is write you a letter saying you can cross the border and go to the States, and you can try to use that to get into classes."

So I emailed what the university had set up as their COVID committee, saying, "Hey, can I provide an antibody test and a letter from my doctor that'll allow me to be on campus so I can continue working and going to classes?" And they told me, no, according to their research, the best bet, even if you had recovered from the disease,

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was to still get vaccinated. I asked them if they could provide the research that they used to say this, and they just stopped communications with me. Which is very frustrating because at this point, I don't know what they're making their rules on. And there's nothing I can do to fight this, which was very disappointing and discouraging.

**Shawn Buckley**

Just so that everyone understands. When you say you had an antibody test and it showed you had the antibodies, that means that you had caught COVID, you had overcome COVID, and you had natural immunity now.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

Having successfully fought COVID.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yeah. On the actual antibody test when it comes back, it says. "This test cannot differentiate between naturally induced antibodies or vaccine induced antibodies."

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, who was this COVID committee that was kind of controlling your life and stopped responding?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

They never released who it was. I asked a couple people, like who is making up this body? It wasn't voted in; the university never disclosed who made up the committee. They just made the committee themselves, and that was it.

**Shawn Buckley**

So there's basically this secret committee whose membership won't be shared with the students, who are basically making decisions that significantly affect people like you, and you don't even know who it is.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yeah. I also asked them, too, if people who disclose their vaccine status to the committee—I said, "Who will be able to see this on the university side?" and they didn't provide an answer. So who knows who's seeing that on the other side. They didn't really provide any information.

**Shawn Buckley**

Right. So they're not going to let you attend in person, even though you have natural immunity. So what did you do?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

So at this point, the university had offered testing in the fall semester. You could get tested. You could go on campus. Every two days you had to go back and get tested again. They asked you questions like, "Who are you on campus for?" "Who can we send this information to?" Things like that when you go to get tested. So before, that was an option. Come the winter, they took that option away, and you could no longer test, and they kicked me out of all of my classes. I was in some in-person and online options. They still took me out of all my classes.

**Shawn Buckley**

So they took you off of the online classes?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

I'm just trying to get my head around this. So they kick you out of the in-person classes because you're not vaccinated, although you have natural immunity. But you can't even attend online classes when you're unvaccinated?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Correct. After that I did re-register in courses because I just needed to finish the degree. At this point, I was very discouraged and I just wanted to get out of that situation. It wasn't doing anything good for me, and I just needed to finish my degree. So I ended up registering for some online options after that. That's where I switched from focusing on microbio to just finishing my degree as a general science degree.

**Shawn Buckley**

Right, okay. Now, you actually were living at home at the time, right?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yes.

**Shawn Buckley**

Can you tell us what happened concerning vaccination with your family and maybe the dynamics that were occurring in that process as COVID went on?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Sure. So right off the beginning because I was skeptical— My mom's a nurse, and so she also knows kind of the science background, stuff like that. And she actually got very sick at

the beginning of COVID with COVID. And she called some people, and they said, “We still recommend you get vaccinated.” So she did, and then everyone else in my family did as well.

**Shawn Buckley**

I’ll just stop you. So you live with both your mother and your father and then you had two siblings.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yeah, and they were at home at this time.

**Shawn Buckley**

Right, okay.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

So I was the only one that chose not to get vaccinated and received a lot of pressure. And I know that they come with good intentions as any mother does, and you know, family. It was just a lot of pressure, you know. [They] mentioned so many times, it was like, “It was your fault. You won’t be able to hang out with your friends.” “You’re going to miss out on all these opportunities.” Stuff like that.

And honestly, it just confused me because I was like, “It’s not my fault that I’m choosing not to get vaccinated. I just don’t think that’s the best health for me. But the repercussions that I’m going to suffer, the loss of friendships, the loss of future opportunity, that’s not my choice, that’s not me doing that.” So it was just really hard because it felt like it was me who was sabotaging my own life, which was very difficult. It was lots of tears. Thankfully, I had a really good support group that I found later on that really helped get me through all of it. But it was very, very difficult.

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, eventually, the kind of dynamics or feeling in your family changed about your vaccination status.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yeah.

**Shawn Buckley**

Do you want to tell us about that and how they currently feel?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Sure. So thankfully my boyfriend also knows

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a lot of science and sat down and had a really good conversation with my mom and really just opened her eyes to everything. And she was so supportive after that, which I'm so thankful for. But now, also, it's the reality of like, we know people who are vaccine-injured: people who have died from getting the vaccine; people who have brain fog, chronic fatigue, debilitating illness. And it'll change their life forever. And being awake to that reality and seeing that is very, very hard.

There's a lot of stress now. Like, what happens to my parents? What happens to one of my siblings? How do you help people through that? What happens if everyone around you dies? I actually had my first ever panic attack realizing that could be a reality, that I could lose everyone around me. And it was very, very difficult.

**Shawn Buckley**

And is it's fair to say that, actually, your family that's vaccinated, they're stressed now that they have been vaccinated?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Oh, for sure, for sure, absolutely.

**Shawn Buckley**

Right, so they've come to realize they're at risk now.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

For sure, yeah.

**Shawn Buckley**

Okay. Now, you were talking about you came across a group that helped you get through this. Can you just share with us about that?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yeah, so Students Against Mandates is the group. It's founded by Leigh Vossen, who's fantastic. She's been a great support. It's just a bunch of students and young adults, even parents, who are just very, very concerned about what was going on. What options did students have? And really, just give a voice to those who are young and going through this. Because up until this point, I didn't know anyone who was on my side, who viewed things the way I saw it. So it was very, very isolating. So to have a group of people who could support you and talk to you about all this was just amazing, and that really did give me hope. It really was just phenomenal.

**Shawn Buckley**

Right, so I imagine that you would probably recommend, if anyone finds themselves in fear and isolated, to find like-minded people.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Absolutely. Share your story. Find people who support you.

**Shawn Buckley**

Now, going forward, is there anything that you think we should have done differently?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Oh, man, I think the biggest thing is that medicine, bodily autonomy, all that needs to be protected to the utmost priority. It's not a group collective. Each person is an individual going through individual situations, and you cannot make a group decision on what people should do. And that should never be pressured.

**Shawn Buckley**

Right, okay. I'm finished asking the questions, but I'll ask if the commissioners have any questions.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Sure.

**Commissioner Drysdale**

Good morning.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Good morning.

**Commissioner Drysdale**

You had mentioned that you had signed up for university, and I assume you paid your tuition before you started?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yes.

**Commissioner Drysdale**

Did they refund you the money when they kicked you out of the classes?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

So at that point I hadn't paid for my tuition. The way the university works is, it's two weeks. They kicked me out of the classes before they started.

In the fall, I'm assuming the reason that they couldn't kick us out of our classes is because we had already paid for our tuition when their mandate had happened. Because they'd actually told us you had to be fully vaccinated by a date in November. But because, I think, we'd already paid, people were already taking the course, and they couldn't have done anything. They didn't have much power. So that's why, I think, they heavily implemented it in January, and then they just kicked people out before tuition had been paid.

**Commissioner Drysdale**

Hmm. Thank you.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yes.

**Commissioner Massie**

Thank you very much for your testimony. I'm a little confused about your situation right now.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Sure.

**Commissioner Massie**

Did you mention that the vax mandate is still in action and prevents you to do some of the courses you'd like to do? Or did I miss that?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yes, so I applied to BC, and in BC, they still have the provincial rules, the laws that say that you have to be vaccinated to participate in clinical. So in naturopathic medicine, the first year you already are in clinics, and you need to be vaccinated for that. So the school does not have the mandate, but the Province is mandating it in clinics. So yes, that is why I cannot go to classes.

**Commissioner Massie**

And are you aware of any prospect that this law at the level of the province will change anytime soon?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

No. That's why I'm looking at American opportunities, hopefully. But I have no idea where I'm going to go with all that. We'll see where opportunities present themselves.

**Commissioner Massie**

Did you explore other provinces?

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Yes, they have a school in Toronto. Last minute, I was told I could go and attend that school. It was about a week before it would have started, and it was not feasible for me to up and move to Toronto. In the future, I may look at that avenue, but I'm not sure if I want to partake in that right now.

**Commissioner Massie**

Thank you.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Thank you.

**Shawn Buckley**

Well, Cassandra, those are our questions. On behalf of the National Citizens Inquiry, we sincerely thank you for coming and sharing your story this morning.

**Cassandra Schroeder**

Thank you so much.

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***Final Review and Approval: Margaret Phillips, August 10, 2023.***

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