INTERVIEW

‘We need to be honest about the nature of the democracy that we live in’

Former justice minister Jody Wilson-Raybould talks with Marie-Danielle Smith about Ottawa’s power problem—and how more free thinkers can change things
I spoke with Jody Wilson-Raybould shortly before the release of her political memoir, “Indian” in the Cabinet. The political memoir, published by HarperCollins, is an account of Wilson-Raybould’s time in federal politics that focuses on her experiences working in Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s first cabinet. The former minister of justice and attorney general was ousted from the Liberal party in 2019, having resigned from cabinet over Trudeau’s perceived interference in a criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin. Our conversation was edited for length and clarity.

How have you been doing during the pandemic?
Faring pretty well. God, I remember having questions like this 18 months ago. Having to transition to a hybrid Parliament was a fascinating experience. It’s made everybody very familiar with Zoom. But I’ve missed the hands-on, in-person meetings and doing stuff in the community.

I don’t know about you, but I started baking. Then I realized the only thing I can do is get outside. I started walking. And now I’m a runner.

It’s also been a good time for introspection, right? Can you walk me through your thought process as you decided to leave Parliament?
When we went into that hybrid Parliament reality, there were some important initiatives that the government moved on to support Canadians through an unprecedented time. It showed me that we can do big things if we actually co-operate.

But that co-operation was short-lived. I witnessed a return to, even more so, this hyper-partisan jockeying for position in terms of acquiring votes and political expediency over the major issues that needed to be discussed. Climate change, Indigenous reconciliation, social justice: the ones that brought me into politics. I’ve always been a copious note-taker, and I write in journals. I started to write different vignettes of experiences that I had in elected leadership, as a minister, as an MP. That was how the book was formed. I was thinking about—this is highfalutin, I guess—the nature of democracy.

I mean, I’m all about that. I was thinking about all the different elected roles that I had and why I got into them in the first place. Was I able to accomplish what I wanted to accomplish?

So at some point along that path, I decided that I need to leave politics for now. I’m happy with my decision. It was a hard one, and there were a lot of emotions around it. The lost opportunity, particularly. And that it didn’t have to be this way.

Your resignation statement called the House of Commons increasingly “toxic and ineffective,” and warned of a “disgraceful triumph of harmful partisanship over substantive action” under current political leadership. You also spoke to the reckoning that Canada’s having over its colonial legacy and systemic biases. It was reminiscent of some of the things NDP MP Mumilaaq Qaqqaq said in her own resignation speech. Based on your experiences operating within these systems, do you think they’re salvageable?