



## New Brunswick Human Rights Commission

**Randy Dickinson**

**The rise of “fake news”**

Well, let me give you an answer from both sides of that question. On a negative perspective, I'm very distressed by the rise of what I call the “fake news” phenomenon, where people are getting information or supposed information from social media that has no resemblance to truth or evidence or facts. It provides a platform to spread hate and stereotypes and negative observations about any particular disadvantaged group that you can think of, whether it's immigrants or people with disabilities or women, or misogynist commentary. It just blows me away that the social media platforms allow people to post things with anonymity—things they would never say face-to-face in a public forum or in a conversation with people, but they feel they have the opportunity to make those serious statements and negative statements, and are doing it online. I think again it reaches out to people who don't take the time to read a newspaper to read a book or to have a conversation or debate with people who have different points of views in order to come to a better, consolidated outcome, as opposed to people who only talk to people of like minds. We can't just preach to the converted of people who already support human rights. We've got to reach out through these platforms to correct misinformation, to correct stereotypes, to speak up when we see something that's wrong and make sure that people's rights are protected—not just my right or your right. I remember there was a story from World War II: This Protestant Reverend was being harassed by the Nazis and he was hid away and he said, “First they came for the Communists and they took them away, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the trade unionist and I wasn't a trade unionist so I didn't speak up. And then they came for the Jews and I wasn't a Jew and they took them away and I didn't speak up. And then they came for me and nobody left to speak up.” So I believe we all have an obligation and a duty to be loud—not confrontational or adversarial—but to be informative and educational and to be positive.