

THE DAVID SUZUKI PODCAST



COVID-19 & THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF LIFE





THEME MUSIC

INTRO

David: “I can’t breathe.”

Those were some of George Floyd’s last words — words that became the rallying cry at anti-racism protests around the world earlier this year.

And now, in the middle of the pandemic, have we ever been more aware, mindful or fearful of the air we inhale?

Safe, clean air is something many of us have long simply taken for granted.

Now, we wear masks and stay 6 feet apart, for fear of the invisible pathogens travelling through the air that could sicken us and upend our lives.

With new immediacy, we’re suddenly aware that everything — right down to the air we breathe — is shared by all life on Earth.

Today, we’re talking about what this new awareness means for our shared future.

During the COVID-19 crisis, emissions have dropped and polluted skies have cleared, while cities and governments are embracing reforestation campaigns for the social, mental health and environmental benefits.

But how do we sustain it once the pandemic has passed? Surely we can’t go on using the air as a dump for our wastes.

In this episode, I talk to Dr. Kwame McKenzie and Jennifer Keesmaat — two leading urban thinkers — about the future of sustainable living in our cities, and how achieving equity can help us all breathe a little easier.

I also speak with David Suzuki Foundation climate policy analyst Gideon Forman about the future of sustainable urban living, and how cities can play a leadership role in building back better from COVID-19.

But first, why should we care about air, anyway?

TRANSITION MUSIC

MONOLOGUE

David: Take a deep breath and hold it for five or six minutes. Of course, you can’t. Your body won’t let you, because air is the most fundamental need we all have.



We hardly think about it, because our bodies do it all automatically.

But let's think about what happens to one breath of air.

[inhales] It's so easy, as the muscles in our diaphragm contract and pull air into us.

The breath passes through our mouth or nostrils, where it's filtered by hairs and cilia, and moistened and warmed up.

It passes into the pharynx at the back of our mouth, past the flap called the epiglottis that closes during swallowing to prevent food from entering, then through the larynx and into the trachea, our air tube.

The trachea divides into two bronchi, one for each lung. They divide and subdivide into secondary and tertiary bronchi, getting narrower and narrower as they proceed into the lung.

Those branch into fine tubules called bronchioles, which end in alveoli — tiny sacs with very fine single-celled walls.

Each alveolus is surrounded by capillaries that connect the pulmonary arteries and veins, and enable transfer of oxygen and carbon dioxide.

We have about 480 million alveoli, which, if you flattened them out in two dimensions, have a collective surface area of about a hundred square metres — the size of a tennis court — processing 5 to 8 litres of air per minute.

When we exhale, our breath spreads through the air; it can enter any animal, including the humans around us. It's absorbed by vegetation. We are embedded in a matrix of air.

Each breath we take contains oxygen atoms that were breathed out by Leonardo da Vinci. We recycle atoms from Einstein, from Cleopatra and the dinosaurs.

Whatever we do to the air — from burning fossil fuels to spraying pesticides to evaporating solvents — we do directly to ourselves.

Because there is no line between us and air. It is in us and flowing through our bodies. We are air. What we do to air, we do to ourselves.

TRANSITION MUSIC

VOICEOVER: KWAME INTRO

David: If there's one place we're especially mindful of the air we breathe, it's the city. In our largest urban centres, when we think of air quality, we might think of smog and other forms



of pollution. These days, crowded cities pose fresh concerns about air that may carry the coronavirus.

My guests today see the pandemic as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to remake our cities — an opportunity to make our cities healthier, friendlier, greener, equitable and prosperous places to live.

Joining me first today is Dr. Kwame McKenzie, CEO of the Wellesley Institute. As a psychiatrist, academic and University of Toronto professor, he's known internationally as a leader in the mental health field. As the co-director of the Division of Equity, Gender, and Population in the Department of Psychiatry at U of T, and director of health equity at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, he's put a spotlight on the fact that not everyone has the same access to health care, and how inequality is shaped by "social determinants of health": race, income, education, access to food, location and community.

Now, bear with me here, but back in the 1970s, there was a discussion about building giant space colonies at Lagrange points. A Lagrange point is the point in space where the gravitational pull of the moon, the sun and Earth all come together, and the idea was to ship these big capsules up there and establish a population. What was striking to me is that you could not have inequity in wealth or power to build a sustainable economy in those space capsules. And something I thought was well worth thinking about, for our lives here on Earth, is that the minute you have inequities building up in power and wealth, you have a very unstable situation. And I mentioned this to Kwame.

KWAME INTERVIEW [Duration 14:39]

Kwame: I really like that idea of, sort of, what happens if you do a thought experiment and say you're going to put people out in space, how's it going to work? Because one of the things that a colleague said to me recently was that COVID-19 was like a huge social X-ray. And it had managed to identify pathologies in our body politic, and that's what it was. And I was sitting there thinking, that is really interesting because most of what COVID-19 seems to have done is made us stop, think and look at things that were hiding in plain sight.

It's not like we didn't know that our long-term care homes were not adequate. It's not like we didn't know that Indigenous populations were not being dealt with reasonably and equitably. And it's not like we didn't know that racialized people, that people with mental health problems, that homeless people and people who lived in poverty were having a very hard time enjoying what is a wonderful life if you are in Canada. We knew all of these things. But part of the problem with adaptation is that when we feel that we can't do anything about it, we get used to it and so these things hide in plain sight.

And what COVID has done is it made us stop and think, and we've had to stop and think, and suddenly people are saying, hey, there are these huge disparities and they've made us weak. They have produced fracture lines that this virus can come and it can get into the fracture lines into society, and it can put us all at risk. And it's difficult for people like me, because I've been saying



for a while, you know that income inequality and inequity are social cancers, that they eat away at the fabric of society and they make us all weaker. And what COVID-19 is doing, all it's doing is what we know, it's just that it's made it clearer to us. So I'm not sure how new it is, but certainly it is made very clear that what we've been doing has been not sustainable.

David: I think you're absolutely right. To me, the COVID pandemic is very revelatory. It reveals a lot of these values that we live with. For example, you know, the fact that when it hit the homes for old people disproportionately, and you saw the response of people like Trump to this, well, it's the old people, you know, in a way, they're a cost to the economy. You know, they get older, they need more medical care, blah, blah, blah. Or we try to hide them away. And I thought that that was very revealing. And then, of course, there's prison populations. It's the homeless and Indigenous and Black and people of colour were being disproportionately affected. And that's really, I think, revealing the kind of society we have.

Kwame: In Toronto, you are 10 times more likely to get COVID if you're poor than if you're rich. And in Toronto, you are six to nine times more likely to get COVID if you're from a racialized group compared to if you're white. And the risk of COVID in white populations in Toronto is relatively low. But they are the richer part of the population, and so they're driving the discussions and discourse about now what do we do? Now when do we open? What do we do, do we open schools or not? And so I think that the power imbalances are causing problems in exactly how we produce the pandemic response, and the worry is that there'll be widening gaps between rich and poor because of COVID.

Unless we're very careful about this, that rather than pull us together, the experience of COVID could be that we increase our segregation. And that's a real worry to me at the moment, because as you know, I'm very interested in the idea of producing these communities that are cohesive and 15-minute communities, where you can have everything you need in walking distance and they're much more robust and much more sustainable. But the question is, how do you do that in an inequitable society where most likely the people who are going to want to join those communities tend to be the richer people.

And so thinking about equity when thinking about sustainability and community development is something that I think needs more attention. And certainly when we're thinking about global warming because the impacts of global warming in Canada are going to be vested significantly on poorer people and racialized people. The question is, what do we do about it in an equitable way, not just what do we do about it? Most public health interventions increase inequities.

David: We don't want to get back to what was already a totally dysfunctional way of living. We've got to learn from multiple crises and really design a way into a truly sustainable future. And that, it seems to me, is what you're offering now. We've got to get a vision of what we can move towards after this crisis passes.

Kwame: Yeah, I agree. I mean, I think back in April or May, people were talking about going back to normal. As you say, when you look back, we say just a second. I live in Toronto. "Normal" means that an average family cannot afford a one-bedroom condo — that's normal in Toronto.



Thirty per cent of kids live in poverty — that's normal in Toronto. Racialized families haven't had a pay rise in about 25 years — that's normal in Toronto. The housing market is completely out of control, so we have overcrowding, and we have a mental health crisis and a homelessness crisis, so that was normal. So the idea of going back to normal was a terrible thing.

And the question is, as you say, what do we know? Well, we know that during COVID, our governments have been able to move incredibly quickly. They've been able to set up social assistance programs like the CERB that are actually richer than EI. They've been able to do that. Different governments across Canada have had different experiences. But in general, they've been housing the homeless. They've been moving people out of shelters into hotels, they've been doing that. Though COVID itself has led to an unprecedented wave of domestic abuse, it's also led to an unprecedented wave of work on trying to support people with domestic abuse. It's led to food insecurity, but it's also led to incredible generosity to try and deal with food insecurity, so that all of these things that have happened... And early on, it was producing a lot more community spirit.

And the question for me is, how do we harness all of those positive things? How do we link that to, as you say, what's happening with people understanding the importance of climate change? And also people thinking about anti-Black racism to think about what we need in the future. And I think that we're now at a pivotal point where politicians have to ask themselves the question: do they want to go forwards or do they want to stay where they are, knowing that if they stay where they are, they're really going backwards because evolution doesn't really stop.

[paragraphs are missing from transcription here]

And there are loads of things like that that we should be saying, well just a second, we proved that some of the bigger problems, if we have the will and if we have a compelling message that we can get people to do, we can move forward on some of the big issues, and that could be the legacy of COVID. It is possible to produce significant social change. It is possible to take on some of the difficult areas. And it is possible to convince the public, when they feel it's in their interest, to do difficult things to protect themselves and others. And if government learn that lesson, then I think it is possible to create a legacy from COVID that's positive.

If you want to change things, you know there's this old thing of, if you've got a system and you want to change it, first of all, you have to unfreeze it. Then you have to create the new system you want, and then you have to freeze it, right? And at the moment, it feels like things are unfrozen. It feels like there is a possibility, but it feels like the aperture is closing. It feels like people are saying, no, we want to freeze it back to, you know, because we're scared. And so in the back of my mind, some of the discourse and some of the discussion around what do you do in your conversation with decision makers is about how you can keep this aperture open and how you can keep it unfrozen for long enough for you to create a difference that can then be frozen.

TRANSITION MUSIC



VOICEOVER: JENNIFER INTRO

David: My second guest is actively involved in building that “new normal” here in Canada. Jennifer Keesmaat is an urban planner with quite the impressive resumé — in fact, she was named one of the most influential people in Canada by Maclean’s magazine. Many might know Jennifer from her work as Toronto’s chief city planner, where she pushed to revitalize public transit and make King Street, an extremely busy thoroughfare, more pedestrian-friendly. When she ran for mayor of Toronto in 2018, she imagined a future city that fought the climate change crisis on multiple levels, with enough green space and smart design to support every resident.

But the Canada we’re living in now is not the same one we knew in previous years. It’s scarier, more uncertain and changing far faster than most of us are comfortable with. Now, Jennifer is among a number of Canadian leaders who say we need to remember the ongoing climate crisis and how it connects to COVID. And so, she got together with some of these leaders to sign the 2020 Declaration for Resilience in Canadian Cities. This declaration makes a big statement: COVID-19 is a chance to rebuild. Jennifer is an advocate, community leader and no stranger to podcasts herself, as the host of the award-winning Invisible Cities, as well as the Within Reach podcast. It’s for all of these reasons and more that I was delighted to welcome her to the show.

JENNIFER INTERVIEW [Duration: 14:56]

David: So if we can start off — I just wondered if you could tell us about the 2020 Declaration for Resilience. What’s that about?

Jennifer: Back at the beginning of lockdown, there was a lot of speculation with respect to what the implications of COVID-19 would in fact be, moving forward for our cities, and particularly because so many people were staying home and there was a sense that, well, we can’t go in crowded places. We can’t go on public transit.

And so, many people in my industry who care passionately about building sustainable cities, we basically saw this window to assert what a resilient future would look like. And also, we saw that there was really a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, a generational moment where there is momentum for change. People are experiencing life in a fundamentally different way. All of a sudden, they don’t have a long commute. And they’re experiencing neighbourhoods in a fundamentally different way.

We started, really, by thinking that what we wanted to do was get people who were recognized as having credibility as thought leaders in a whole variety of sectors. So we have the health sector, we have people in city building, we have politicians. And the idea was to really create this cross-disciplinary collaboration of people who have credibility because of the things that they’ve done, because of their work.

So we identified three key, kind of overarching categories for the recommendations. So the first one is ensuring the responsible use of land. That’s at the foundation of resiliency, really — how we use land, how we treat land, how we interact with land, the stories we tell about land as well. The



second key area is around accelerating the decarbonization of our transportation systems. How do we get away from our dependency on oil? And then the third area is embracing sustainability in both our built and our natural environments.

So under the responsible use of land, committing to the creation of 15-minute neighbourhoods. And this is something that the mayor of Paris has pushed, pushed, pushed really hard under COVID is this idea that if we design our neighbourhoods with a whole variety of things within close proximity, we can mitigate our environmental footprint because we can walk, we can cycle, we can live at the neighbourhood level again, even though we're a part of a really big metropolis. So we have some very specific ideas about how we can create, for example, aging in place as a result of designing 15-minute neighbourhoods. One of the reasons why we, you know, take our elderly and warehouse them off to these incredibly unsafe places to live is because we haven't designed neighbourhoods that actually have the social supports and the design supports to allow people to age in place.

Under decarbonizing our transportation systems, really we double down on the importance of transit as the backbone of sustainable, walkable urban places. And then the third area, you know, one of my favourites, is we recommend enacting a funded, detailed plan to achieve a 40 per cent urban tree canopy in our cities. We know this is — hey, COVID is in part a respiratory disease. Trees are directly connected to our access to clean air.

David: Looking in the past, when you look at cities — well, I mean, this is hundreds of years ago — apparently people just took their slop, their sewage, and dumped it out the window onto the streets. Then we had plague outbreaks. Then we discovered that rats and fleas have an impact on us. So is COVID that moment, is COVID one of these things that say, hey folks, you're living in a crazy way?

Jennifer: COVID is 100 per cent one of those moments. The public health initiatives that we see in cities are precisely because of their reactions to public health concerns, and COVID is a public health issue. So in some ways, this is an opportunity for us to re-up our game, right? This is our opportunity to go, hold on a minute — here we have a public health crisis. We have an environmental crisis. We have a social equity crisis. How can we drive forward just and sustainable approaches to community design?

The public health crisis isn't separate from the environmental crisis. We need to link these objectives together and link together the way we think about the future.

Part of what we have to do is we have to be able to envision and dream and plan for a future that says, wait a minute, we're not going to compromise creating a sustainable planet. We're not going to compromise social equity because we've had a pandemic. In fact, we're going to see because we've had a pandemic should actually reinforce the fact that we need to make our cities more sustainably and more socially just.

David: Yeah. You know, I've been locked down since March 13th in a cabin here on the coast of British Columbia. And it's been amazing in the sense that with my grandchildren, we go out and



we've gathered stinging nettles to eat, and we've been... you know, clams and oysters, and we catch prawns.

Jennifer: You are right on brand.

David: But, every week we go out, we order from the grocery store here on a remote island. I get lettuce, I get tomatoes, I get, you know, all kinds of... bananas for the grandchildren. You know damn well that our, you know, even out here that the footprint around the world is great. Now you start thinking of the city and all of that stuff that comes in. How do we reduce the city's footprint that goes way beyond the boundaries of the city?

Jennifer: So the first way that we start to reduce that consumption is by living a daily life that isn't so spread out in terms of what we consume. I would argue, then, the second way does actually have to do with food production, because our food system involves food travelling incredibly vast distances. I'm sure those bananas were not grown in Vancouver. Those bananas travelled, and there's an environmental cost associated with the travelling of those bananas. So shifting to more local food production and local food consumption, and integrating how we provide food into our cities. Now, I do think the next big wave in our cities will be urban agriculture, and it's starting to happen.

My mother and my grandmother know how to cultivate food from the earth. I do not. Those skills have been lost in my generation, and we're going to have to regain those skills. And my children are even further removed from those skills. I think the second way that we make our footprint smaller and we reduce our consumption is going to be around food production.

David: I worry because, you know, a lot of people say, well, you know, the way we're living now is a new normal, as if the way we used to live before COVID was normal. That was not normal to begin with.

Jennifer: The good news is that we can change. We can adapt our cities. We can change how we use land. We can create places where we're no longer dependent on cars, where we're not consuming so much land in how we get around. [text missing here]

David: If we really do use COVID as our opportunity to begin a shift in the way that our cities are designed, to me, it's obvious that it's going to be about people, and what is it that matters most? Their health, their social needs, their spiritual needs. That's going to guide us. How will a city look in 50 years if we get through that and really do make that fundamental shift?

Jennifer: Well, this is a really critical question because one of the things we haven't talked about yet is access to housing, and we have a housing crisis in Canada and we have a housing crisis in our biggest cities.

So I believe that if we kind of take this moment and we seize the opportunity that it presents, we will design a significant amount of affordable rental housing in walkable neighbourhoods, in neighbourhoods that fill that vision of the 15-minute neighbourhood dream.



So we're going to have to take neighbourhoods that have a lot of sprawl and we're going to have to add in density. We're going to have to add in a mixture of uses, whether it's daycares or community facilities or access to food markets or community gardens. And in doing so, we'll begin to recreate the fabric of the city. And we'll do it in such a way that we're truly creating inclusive cities, that we're creating places where everyone can thrive.

So that 50-year vision is a city where, eh, no one talks about real estate. No one sweats about where they're going to live or raise their family, because we have an abundance of affordable housing in great neighbourhoods where it's possible to walk to school, it's possible to walk to work. But where we also have food production integrated into our local neighbourhoods.

I think there's a phenomenal dawning opportunity in cities around the world for actually bringing nature into our cities and recognizing that the ecological, environmental systems — the waterways, the ravines that support us — actually become very present in our city.

And so in that 50-year future, we actually see much better outcomes in terms of mental health because people who live in dense, urban, walkable neighbourhoods also have an abundance of access to nature. Children climb trees in cities — that's the future city. There are cities where children can climb trees.

David: How do we get that picture to guide us, rather than the political and economic factors?

Jennifer: Well, I'll tell you a very specific example. When I was the chief planner in Toronto, we brought forward a green bylaw essentially requiring developers to build sustainable buildings with green roofs on the buildings. This was actually just before I came in — I implemented this as chief planner. And the developers said to us, you know, if you do this, it'll kill development in the city. And so we had to ask a really critical question: do we want development if it isn't making us healthier? Do we want development if it doesn't fit with that vision of creating a more sustainable city? And the answer was no. And so we pushed forward with the policy framework, and now developers are required through public policy to build green roofs. And now in the city of Toronto, we have more green roofs than any other city in the world.

And in some ways, strong public policy is a counter to kind of the greed of corporate capitalism. So we actually have to keep those two things in constant tension. And to be honest, Dr. Suzuki, this is why I did run for office, is because I believe leadership matters. You get different outcomes.

All we need to do, like they do in many Western European cities, is say every new development must build a third social housing, a third affordable housing and a third market housing. If we did that, we would be building housing for everyone in society. All it takes is public policy. All it takes is getting it passed.

We tend to think of things like cities as being static, and they're not static at all. They're constantly being reinvented. After Hurricane Sandy in New York City, within two years, they integrated 6,000 bioswales throughout the entire city. They did that through a policy program at the Environmental Protection Agency that basically gave them matching funding if when they were replacing part



of the road right-of-way, if they added in a bioswale, which was really critical to managing water in the city. And so, you do that for 10 years and you've completely transformed how water gets managed and absorbed and purified within the landscape of a large city like New York. So in a decade, you can really transform the way the city is experienced through a whole series of incremental interventions.

We've been a little bit late to the game in realizing that the challenge isn't just, you know, how do we reduce our environmental impact? The challenge is also, how do we adapt to a changing climate? How do we plan for a world that is hotter and a world that is wetter and a world that is colder, and how do we ensure our most vulnerable populations, in particular... we're going to mitigate the impacts of a hotter, wetter, colder world on people that are most vulnerable in our cities?

So I'm a proponent of actually broadening the lenses that we bring to this. So bringing that building lens, that neighbourhood lens and that community lens, and integrating significantly more housing. We have a housing shortage in this country. We have people in this country that are not housed and that are poorly housed. We're a wealthy nation — we should fix this. We have the money to fix it. We have the design skills to fix it. We need the political will to fix it.

TRANSITION MUSIC

GIDEON INTERVIEW [Duration: 9:45]

David: I'm now joined by my guest expert for today, Gideon Forman. Gideon is a climate change and transportation policy analyst with the David Suzuki Foundation, an active campaigner for sustainable transit and transportation issues in Toronto. His work touches everything from air pollution and emissions reduction to bike lanes and the linkages between friendship and a sustainable future. Yeah, you heard that right! Gideon, the theme of the episode is Air. As an urban sustainability campaigner and climate expert, what does it mean to you, the word air?

Gideon: First of all, air is life and death. I mean, what did the [American] Lung Association say? What's their slogan, "When you can't breathe, nothing else matters"? So it really is life and death, and as environmental activists, we know that millions of people around the world die each year, have premature death, because of air pollution. In fact, I was looking at some stats recently — they called it a pandemic, interestingly. Over 8 million people a year die globally from bad air. That's more than the number that die from tobacco. So it really is a life-and-death issue, protecting air quality. The other piece, maybe more philosophically, is that I think air is emblematic of the interconnectedness that we all experience. The elements that leave my mouth when I exhale are picked up by other creatures. When they exhale, I pick up the elements that they are exhaling. And so at a very material, real level, there is this connectedness between us and other people, between us and other creatures. And so I think air is emblematic of that deep identity that we have with the natural world.

David: It's really telling that George Floyd, when he died, you know, "I can't breathe." I think people realized then how utterly dependent we are on that air. You've been campaigning at the national



level and the municipal level in Toronto for years. Tell us about the major issues our cities currently face due to the climate crisis. What are we up against?

Gideon: Broadly speaking, many of our cities in Canada and I think globally are still organized around the private, gas-burning automobile. They are designed to facilitate the movement of these cars. And then the other large problem, of course, is heating our homes in cities. And many of our homes are still heated by natural gas, which is a big source of greenhouse gas emissions. So between those, transportation and heating, those are two big climate challenges that cities face now.

David: So it's funny, you know, the thing that really bugs me — when I'm standing on the corner waiting for a bus, I watch the cars go by and I would say eight out of 10 cars have a single person in them. And it's the same thing on highways. You know, there's a big debate now, in the election coming up, about whether to build a 10-lane bridge at enormous cost now, just to funnel more of these single occupant cars into Vancouver, it's crazy.

Gideon: And the other interesting thing is that the research shows that in Toronto, the majority of folks now don't look to the car as their main mode of transportation. Sixty per cent walk, cycle or take public transit. So we have a city that's geared to the private car, but that's not where people are at. You can build bike lanes for a song, and they move thousands of people a day. I was actually part of a count. We work with a local cycling advocacy group in Toronto. And so we did a count — we videotaped, and they put a new bike lane in. And within days of it being up and running, you know, over 4,000 people a day were being moved by this bike lane, you know, that cost a tiny fraction of what it would cost to put a new highway in.

David: As we emerge from the pandemic, how can we capitalize on this unique moment? I mean, certainly in the first weeks, I remember cities seemed to be abandoned, you know, and I think people were really kind of starting to ask, well, what the heck, why am I spending an hour and a half, two hours a day stuck in a car? How can we make sure that we don't just revert back to the old ways?

Gideon: Yeah, I mean, I think we have to see some lessons in COVID. I think if we talk to people about climate and air pollution as health issues, as human health issues, I think it has a lot of purchase.

I mean, I think we've learned some important lessons from COVID, and I think we can pivot from some of those lessons and keep the momentum going. One thing that we learned right away is that as a society, we can make change very quickly if we want to. We also learned in COVID a second thing — that you have to listen to the science. And I think the other thing we've learned from COVID, also encouraging and hopeful, is that we can work internationally, for example on vaccines, and we can work in a non-partisan way.

So, I mean, I think there have been these lessons that have come out of COVID, very encouraging ones. And I think that it shows we can pivot quickly if we want to, and we can apply these lessons in the case of the climate crisis.



David: You know, one of the things that Naomi Klein has said in *The Shock Doctrine* is that when you have a crisis, usually an economic crisis, then often the extremists, extreme right wing then takes advantage, and they do get this transformation, but the wrong way. I think, again, you know, there's a huge opportunity, and yet I see our government is still trying to serve, you know, well, "We need the economy up. We've got to build that pipeline." And it's very frustrating.

Gideon: It is, but there are also some hopeful things. I mean, I think we can build a green and just world. Many of the things that are going to create jobs are also environmentally very valuable, so I mean I think there's some hopeful things out there as well.

David: So if you were prime minister, what would you do, then, in making that just, green transition?

Gideon: First and foremost, we have to move away from fossil fuels, that all the science, I don't need to tell you, points in that way. And we have to do it in a way that's fair to folks who are in that industry, so we do need to help folks, particularly in Western Canada but in the Maritimes as well, in Newfoundland, to transition away from oil and gas.

Fortunately, there are things that people in the oil and gas sector can do, and we're seeing some of that. The government has talked about, you know, redeploying some of those folks to work on orphan wells, and they could also be doing other sorts of environmental remediation.

I don't need to tell you that in places like southern Alberta, southern Saskatchewan, southern Manitoba, we have a world-class solar and wind resource, and we have an incredible amount of sun. A lot of people could be put to work building solar and wind.

Another thing that I think is really emblematic of a green and just recovery, David, is electric buses. You can get the buses up and running quickly. Obviously, they contribute to cleaner air and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but they can also be built in Canada. And we already have companies in Quebec and in Manitoba that build electric buses. And we could build a lot more, and we could build them quite quickly. So there's an example of something that does justice to the green end of things and also could create a lot of jobs. And I think we need to do more of that, but the good news is that we already know many of the solutions that we need for a green and just recovery.

David: Just let me ask you one more question: if you could really design what you think the post-COVID world were, what would a city look like?

Gideon: First of all, it'd be a lot greener. I mean, let's take places that are now just storing our cars, like parking lots, and turn them into green spaces. Let's turn them into areas where we're growing food. You know, one of the things that really excites me, David, is urban agriculture. I mean, if we're gonna be more resilient coming out of the pandemic, for goodness' sake, we have to grow more of our food. Most of us in Canada live in cities, so cities should be growing food. I think we would see a city that was configured around walking and cycling and public transit with wide sidewalks and protected and safe bike lanes, so that people could move without polluting. I mean, they could move in a zero emission way.



And I think we'd plant more trees, of course, and we would also make more use and protect our waterways much more. I mean, Toronto, for example, is on a beautiful lake, but, you know, it's often polluted with sewage. So we would see a much better sewage system, so that we could swim and fish in the lake that's right there in our city. And of course, these would all have justice aspects as well. We could grow food in communities where people are struggling economically. Many people can't afford to go to a cottage. They need to be able to swim in the lake that's right at their doorstep. So making the city greener would have this equity aspect in a very beautiful way, I think.

[paragraphs missing from David and Gideon]

TRANSITION MUSIC

OUTRO

David: Thanks to Gideon Forman for that expert interview. The David Suzuki Foundation is so lucky to have him as one of our leading climate policy analysts — and he's just so easy to listen to!

And thank you for listening to Season 1 of The David Suzuki Podcast: COVID-19 & the Basic Elements of Life — produced by the David Suzuki Foundation in partnership with Jason Arkley Productions.

I recorded these interviews from the traditional, unceded territory of the We Wai Kai First Nation. I am so grateful for how Indigenous Peoples have been responsible stewards of these beautiful lands for thousands of years, and how they continue to teach us so much about how to live sustainably on this planet.

For more information on how you can help advance a green and just recovery from COVID-19, visit davidssuzuki.org/greenandjustrecovery.

To support our work and help us make more podcasts like this one, visit davidssuzuki.org/donate.

This wouldn't have been possible without our incredible production team: Jason Arkley, David Leibl and Brendan Glauser.

And Katie Jensen, Renita Bangert and Michal Stein of Vocal Fry Studios.

Theme music by Scott Nolan. Artwork generously provided by Roy Henry Vickers.

Until next time, take care of yourself, each other and this beautiful living planet. It is, after all, our only home.

To close this episode, a track by songwriter Richard Inman. Richard Inman has become a staple in Winnipeg's folk and country scene. With his rich baritone voice and delicate musical touch, he crafts songs that feel both familiar and fresh. In his music, Inman tells stories about the everyday



people and places he's come across in his life. Here is Richard Inman with "Snowbird".

[paragraph missing from Richard Inman]

MUSIC PERFORMANCE