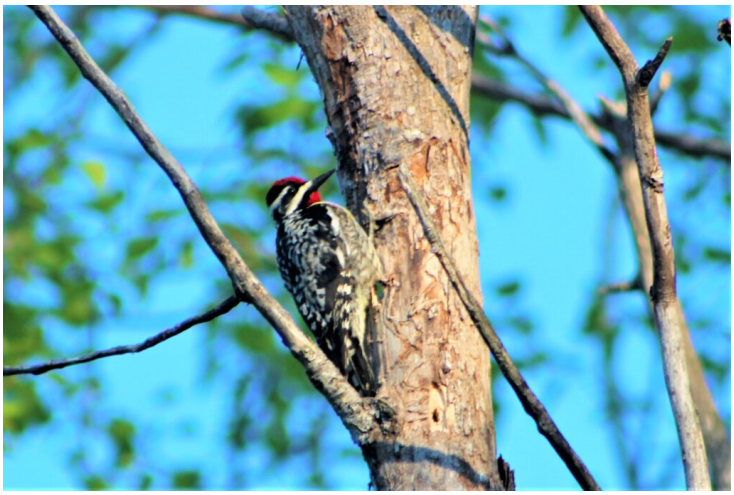
The cost of a life



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By Nate Smelle

Every moment we are alive from at least our first breath until our last we are learning. As we receive these lessons via our experiences and observations of the world we are a part of, we process this information internally and transmit it outward through our interactions with others and the environment. In turn, as both student and teacher, at any given moment we are simultaneously shaping and being shaped by our world.Understanding this time-tested, irrefutable truth, we can see how what we put out in the world comes back to us. This simple fact can be affirmed by analyzing any scenario we choose to focus our attention on.For instance, imagine that you were raised by a family in which you were consistently told that: working for or paying employees less than a living wage is acceptable; humans are not accelerating climate change; and, unbridled, infinite economic growth is the foundation of a fair, happy and healthy society. Now imagine how after allowing yourself to be shaped by these fallacies you learn from your experience of exploiting others and the Earth that your own self-centeredness has elevated your own standard of living above those you are taking advantage of. Then, as a reward for your greed-based success, you are elected as the leader of a political party that operates according to the same philosophy that has guided you throughout life.Looking at such a scenario it would make sense from your point of view to fight against raising the minimum wage to a living wage. Despite the fact we live in a finite world, it would make sense to cut ?red tape,? deregulate business and development, no matter what the cost to the environment and the people who rely on it for the clean air, water, soil, and biodiversity they need to survive. Rather than respecting the facts about the climate crisis supported by the overwhelming majority of the scientific community, it would seem logical then as well to spend thousands of dollars on gas pump stickers that encourage inaction on human-caused climate change. From this point of view it might even seem ?wise? to ignore a crisis in Ontario's long term care homes 30+ years in the making, and hand over approximately $700 million in subsidies funded with taxpayers money each year to the grotesquely rich fossil fuel industry ? an industry notoriously known for poisoning the planet and people ? instead of investing that money in health care.Speaking directly to the people of Ontarians during his daily COVID-19 briefing on May 4, Premier Doug Ford said ?We all have to ask ourselves, what is the cost of a life? Is a life worth a picnic in the park? Is a life worth going to the beach? Is a life worth having a few cold ones with your buddies in the basement? The answer is no.?Through our firsthand experience and observations of the pandemic over the past four months we have learned this is not true. Sadly, there is under this government's rule a cost of a life. A cost that is most clearly and currently being exposed by the state of this province's long-term care facilities, and the collateral damage deemed acceptable by an ideology that values greed above need.So far, more than half of Ontario's 2,200+ deaths caused by COVID-19 have occurred in these facilities ? facilities designed to care for the people who have made us what we are today ? our elders. We have to ask ourselves how many of those 1,400+ people would be alive today if our provincial government would have cut off the corporate welfare cheque we give ?Big Oil? every year, and invested that funding into our long-term care system.Even if the answer is one, I

am certain that person's family would say it would have been money well spent.