

Talking priorities



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By Nate Smelle

Last week, the province released its most recent projections regarding what Ontarians can expect in terms of the extent of the spread of COVID-19 in the next month. Currently clocking more than 1,000 new cases every day over the past two weeks, I was surprised when I learned that the forecast by the provincial government's science advisory table was much more grim than I had anticipated.

According to the province's scientific modelling, if additional measures and restrictions are not implemented we could see up to 6,500 new cases of COVID-19 on a daily basis by mid-December. Yes, 6,500 a day. Let that sink in for a moment.

That's more than one and a half times the entire population of the Town of Bancroft becoming infected every 24 hours.

Yesterday Ontario recorded more than 1,400 new cases. Even more alarming is that in the last week 120 people in Ontario have lost their lives due to the pandemic.

That means that this Christmas there will be 120 less grandmothers, grandfathers, mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, cousins, friends, neighbours, and co-workers celebrating the holidays this year.

Why is it that we are seeing this massive surge of infection, which seems to be inline with the province's own projections that our government in Ontario seems to be more concerned with the health of the economy, than the lives of our loved ones?

Why does Premier Doug Ford talk more about how his "heart aches" for business owners than the pain and suffering of Ontarians who have watched their family and friends die alone?

The answer is simple ? priorities.

While the Ford government focuses on things like stripping away the power of our conservation authorities to appease their developer friends, who are itching to exploit our Provincially Significant Wetlands and other ecologically essential ecosystems, he is knowingly neglecting to recognize the fact that our individual health and the health of our economy is fundamentally dependent on the health of our environment.

Addressing the pandemic at a press conference on Nov. 17, our Prime Minister Justin Trudeau revealed how his priorities during the crisis differ from those of Premier Ford when he explained to Canadians that "By putting the health of your friends, family, and fellow citizens first, you're actually doing the very best thing to protect the economy too. We don't have to choose, we just have to act."

Likewise, by adding the health of our environment - the planet that gives us the air, water, soil, biodiversity, and food we need to live - to our list of priorities, we are in turn putting the health of your friends, family, fellow citizens, and future generations first.

Throughout this public health crisis we have heard over and over again how the pandemic is gifting us with opportunities. By identifying the priorities of those we elect in terms of which opportunities they pursue, we the people are given the opportunity to see what it is our elected representatives truly value; which issues they are willing to take a stand for.