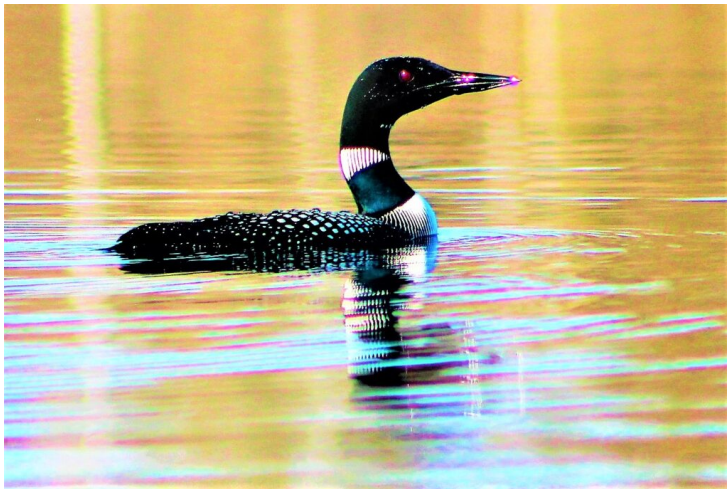


A matter of priority



NATE SMELLEStaff

FOR THE MAJORITY of the past few months talk in the media and throughout pop culture regarding the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted away from warning the public about a potentially deadly threat to our survival as a species to reminding consumers to get out there and spend, spend, spend!

As difficult as it is to remain an optimist for someone who pays attention to the news, I have to admit that for a brief moment it felt like we were on the other side of this global health crisis. The numbers were going down, stores were re-opening, audiences and congregations began filling concert halls, theatres, and large sporting venues to full capacity. There was, for a second, a sense that we were returning to what we once considered to be "normal."

Then, a few weeks ago, just when we convinced ourselves that we could start refocusing on issues of lesser importance to us "little things such as health-care, education, homelessness, poverty, the opioid epidemic, and the climate crisis" the number of cases began inching upwards again. Returning an eye to the international state of the pandemic, I could feel the sense of urgency rolling in each morning on a wave of reports documenting the quickly rising case counts and death tolls from around the world. Less than a week later came the warnings of lockdowns, travel bans, essential services, oh my. By Nov. 19, under the downward pressure of the fourth wave of COVID-19 to hit the country, Austria had announced a strict nationwide lockdown for all citizens, scheduled to last for at least 20 days.

Within five days of Austria's clampdown to prevent the spread of the virus, there were whispers of a new, potentially more transmissible and deadly variant of COVID-19 arising from South Africa. Not even 24 hours later, the World Health Organization raised the alarm, warning all countries of the new Omicron variant driving up the numbers in seven relatively "unvaxxed" nations in southern Africa, including: Botswana; Mozambique; Zimbabwe; Lesotho; Namibia; Swaziland; and South Africa. By the morning of Monday, Nov. 29 there were more reports of the Omicron variant being diagnosed in countries such as: Australia, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Britain, Israel, Hong Kong, Belgium, Switzerland, Belgium, and yes "Canada." There is no doubt in my mind that everyone reading this is at least as tired as I am of this pandemic-induced nightmare we are living through. However, as nice as it would be to snub our noses at COVID-19 and look the other way "a skill we have become accustomed with in our approach to homelessness, poverty, the opioid epidemic, and the climate crisis" we cannot afford to ignore the immediate danger this deadly virus adds to our daily routine. We also cannot afford to ignore the fact that the longer we wait to actually deal with homelessness, poverty, the opioid epidemic, and the climate crisis, the more it will cost us to overcome these afflictions in the end. Instead of ignoring the hard-earned scientifically proven truths that will keep us and future generations of our loved ones safe and well, we need to start ignoring the ignorance of those who believe their right to wrong others is what we should all be fighting for.