

Dismantling our ability to care



By Nate Smelle

JUST FOR A moment, or perhaps, as long as necessary, let's put aside our political differences, and have a serious discussion about two of the most essential elements involved in the formation of an enjoyable quality of life: our health and happiness. While some might debate the rights of all to enjoy the latter, it is impossible to deny that good health for all is the best possible outcome for the future of humanity. Of course if we are talking about best possible outcomes, then I'm sure you would agree that good health and happiness for all would be an even better scenario. Considering the fact that one cannot sustain their happiness without good health, it is also critical to acknowledge that our ability to experience an enjoyable quality of life is therefore dependent on our potential to be healthy. In light of these simple yet irrefutable observations, one may gain insight into what can be identified as the purpose of politics: humanity's innate desire to foster the best possible quality of life for the most, ideally all people. I highly doubt anyone, no matter which colour the sign on their lawn may be during election time, would disagree that such all-encompassing compassion would be a worthwhile goal for those engaged in our political system to strive for. With this goal in mind, any honest, well-intentioned politician comes to understand the fundamental value of establishing a robust, publicly-funded health care system that provides the best care possible to the greatest number of people. So, as we harbour this awareness, why is it that in 2024 politicians are attempting to dismantle the public health care system we have built with our tax dollars over generations? Initially I began writing this column over a month ago as a sort of follow up to the many attempts I have made to have a discussion ? on or off the record ? with our local Member of Provincial Parliament Ric Bresee. However, after witnessing the so-called ?leader? of the federal Conservatives tuck his tail between his legs and run scared back into the make-up room when confronted with a question about whether he would attempt to dismantle the national pharmacare program tabled by the federal Liberals and New Democrats, I realized that the reason for our MPP's silence is that both the federal and provincial Conservatives are ashamed of their stance on health care. Oh well, I suppose in a democracy we all get stuck with the government we deserve whether we voted for them or not. As our friends south of the border gear up for what will certainly be the most important election in the nation's history, we have the luxury of sitting back and watching the circus from a distance. Still, because our federal election is not expected to take place until 2025 thanks to the cooperation of the Liberals and NDP, we have the opportunity to learn from their political decisions. As someone who watches every American and Canadian election very closely, the influence that politics in the United States has on Canada is undeniable. For example, just look to the half-assed insurrection by the misnamed ?Freedom Convoy? which took place after an oddly similar Trump-led insurrection on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. Some of you reading this might be wondering why I am getting into American politics while discussing health care in Ontario and Canada? Well, basically because we tend to follow our southern neighbours either right or left after each one of their elections. That is why it is so crucial for us to pay attention to what a second Trump presidency will mean for Canadians. According to the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, ?Between the years 2016 and 2019?the majority of President Donald Trump's [previous] term in office?the number of Americans without health insurance jumped by about 2.3 million, and that loss of health coverage led to at least 3,399 deaths and possibly as many as 25,180,

a new analysis found. Does this fit with our vision of the health care we deserve as Canadians, as humans for that matter? What about the best health and happiness for all? Watching the federal Conservative's Pierre Poilievre fail to convince anyone paying attention that he genuinely cares about the health and happiness of working class Canadians – the majority of us – it is no wonder he is becoming more unlikeable with every word that exits his face. Discovering this week that the Bancroft Community Family Health Team is desperately seeking financial support from local municipalities to maintain the quality of health care in the region is as it sounds reason for alarm among all of us. Everyone reading this has at one time or another relied on our publicly-funded health care system in Ontario. Yet still, somehow, the government we elected twice continues to do everything possible to dismantle this essential component in our quality of life. Despite recent announcements from the Ford government regarding alleged funding for health care in Ontario, our local family health team will receive nothing. That's right, nothing! In fact, the Bancroft Community Family Health Team has not received a cost-of-living increase or operational cost funding in over 10 years. That's right, 10 years! In that time, what has our provincial government done to actually improve the quality of health care in North Hastings? As necessary as wishes and prayers aimed to improve our health are, how do they expect the quality of care to improve if they are not willing to invest in our local health care system? Recognizing that the organization is already in a compromised position, our provincial government, if they want to be re-elected outside of ridings such as Hastings – Lennox and Addington that almost always vote blue, they need to realize that their voters actually care about their personal health and happiness; and that means having access to high quality publicly-funded health care in Ontario. We all know health care is the responsibility of the province, not the municipality. The Ford government also needs to know that we Ontarians are smarter than they think; and, that we will not allow them to dismantle our ability to care for each other.