

The big shift



Dec. 8, 2020

By Nate Smelle

As we have seen over and over again throughout 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on the urgency of the compounding crises society has learned to live with. However, just because we previously chose to look the other way instead of focusing our collective energy on solving these crises, it doesn't mean we should continue to do so.

No longer can we claim ignorance of the facts as an excuse for our societal inaction when it comes to poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, addictions and mental health issues, environmental destruction, and the climate crisis. Fortunately, for the sake of our shared future, the intersection of each of these crises with the global pandemic has forced those working on a solution to COVID-19 to confront hard truths that now demand an immediate and appropriate response. For example, on several occasions the front-line workers at the North Hastings Community Trust have highlighted how practicing good hand hygiene and physical distancing can be much more difficult, and in many cases impossible for people dealing with homelessness, hunger, and/or addictions and mental health issues.

Through the coming together of the climate crisis and COVID-19, we discovered how delicate our existence as a species by underlining our connection with all life on this planet through the air, water, soil, and biodiversity we need to live. Witnessing a record number of wildfires scorch the earth in California; and, the worst hurricane season ever in 2020, we also learned firsthand how uncompromising the climate crisis is.

Looking on the brightside of 2020, the pandemic has also shown us how much we can accomplish when we put aside our differences and work together. For far too long we have complacently remained idle, accepting without question when governments tell us they can't afford to solve the above mentioned crises.

Luckily for us, we know now that this is not true. Heading into the new year with this new awareness, I feel a sense of hope that the resistance to improving our health-care and education systems, and protecting our planet now makes less sense to more people. As I have alluded to in this column time and time again, unlike any other time in human history, we now have the unprecedented opportunity to create a more socially just and environmentally sustainable world. One that makes well-being of people and the planet the priority, instead of the already bloated bank accounts of billionaires.

We know now that when pressed by a global emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic our government's can channel the resources

to where they are needed most.

Why in the past has the same attention not been given to poverty, food insecurity, homelessness, the climate crisis when each of these crises destroy lives every day?

Redesigning our social structure and our economy, will demand sacrifice on everyone's part. Especially when it comes to the world's wealthiest individuals.

The age of corporate welfare is over.

No longer can we logically allow the prehistoric, elitist thinking that has convinced us to fork over billions of dollars in subsidies to the fossil fuel industry each year in Canada. Since the recovery will certainly require an astronomical increase in government spending, frivolously continuing to stuff the pockets of the ultra rich with the hard-earned money of low and middle-income earners is not an option.

Inevitably then, to facilitate this great shift in our priorities, the funds necessary must come from the billionaire class. In the beginning of this transition, extracting these resources will most definitely be like pulling teeth. Nevertheless, just like it is necessary to make a trip to the dentist when we are in pain, the only way to end the suffering caused by this global health crisis is with a more equitable redistribution of wealth being hoarded by a relatively small group of people who already have more than enough money to sustain their families for several generations.