

## Just One Question

by SHERALYN ROMAN

On a happier note this week, at least for me and the 81+ million people who voted for him, let's all just take a moment to pause and be grateful for at least one thing: the world is now well rid of Trump. I believe, together with millions of Americans, that we collectively sighed with relief at 12:01pm January 20th knowing that the nuclear codes were now out of the hands of the man who damn near decimated democracy. While it frightens me to think about what he might be up to next, nothing could be as frightening as having him ?in charge.? Or could it? The spread of misinformation, lies, fake news and just plain irresponsible journalism threatens us daily and if the power of media has shown us anything ? it's just how dangerous fake news can be. Trump was a master of it and I fear he is not done with us yet. Whether from Trump or elsewhere, fake news is still circulating widely, in particular ?news? about the pandemic, and that concerns me. Makes me wonder, is there a solution?

Surprisingly, in my media feeds, conspiracy theories actually seemed to escalate the week after President Biden was elected. I'm not sure if that was just a fluke or if TNN (Trump News Network) is already at work behind the scenes.

Here in Canada, helped along by two recent letters (posted publicly) by MPP's Hillier and Baber, multiple ?news? claims continue to be made about COVID-19. References as to the questionable source of the virus, how the World Health Organization is allegedly disseminating falsehoods and how China is intentionally covering up and blocking the truth about COVID-19's origins are still pervasive. Folks seem to be increasingly sceptical rather than less so in the wake of the US election. Scepticism is good. Questioning our media and our government officials is good. A healthy democracy demands scepticism but pandemic fatigue is escalating and more and more people are becoming frustrated, angry, depressed and disenfranchised. Fatigue and frustration are a dangerous combination. They make folks more susceptible to things like fake news. Again, I wonder ? is there a simple solution to the ?plague of fake news?? I doubt it. But is there a simple solution to virus containment? I think so and I wonder, why aren't we following it?

At least on the issue of the fact there IS a global pandemic, I think we all agree. The virus continues to rage in our communities, and around the world, in fact, it appears to be mutating, making it potentially even more problematic. People are dying in the millions and there is no ?iron ring of protection? around our most vulnerable residents in long term care homes. Students and teachers are suffering despite alleged improvements to ventilation and ?increased? asymptomatic testing, both of which do nothing to alleviate mental health issues. Businesses are closing at an alarming rate and hospitals are overrun.

Concurrently, cases of seasonal flu are almost non-existent. Perhaps because large numbers of folks who are listening to the public health advice, practicing social distancing, wearing masks and only going out for essential requirements are staying healthy. While some have fallen ill and, sadly, a few have died, our medical professionals are not suffering from COVID in large numbers. It makes me wonder whether in fact masks, sanitizing, social distancing and soon ? the vaccine ? are actually working? And - if these measures are working - why aren't we all just following the health recommendations regardless of our personal beliefs, theories or assumptions about how and where COVID-19 began?

There. That's the question. Whether you think this is all just some big damn conspiracy theory or not is irrelevant! It appears that when used ?according to directions? mask wearing alone is a pretty good preventative measure against COVID-19 (and the flu!) Combined with the distancing and the hand-washing and, yes, some slight infringement on my ability to visit my local store, I'm happy to avoid COVID if all I have to do is wear a damn mask.

Whether this virus was unleashed by accident or on purpose from a lab in Wuhan, China, whether it's a global conspiracy by big business to eliminate competition and increase profits or even a ploy to microchip us all ? the cure (or at least significant curbing of the virus) is the same. We know how it spreads, so it's up to each of us, regardless of our beliefs, to help stop the spread.

I read an interesting quote the other day and I think it's applicable here: ?You must ALWAYS be willing to truly consider evidence that contradicts your beliefs, and admit the possibility that you may be wrong. Intelligence isn't knowing everything. It's the ability

to challenge everything you know.? Please, by all means question away! Question your sources of information and question our government and how they are responding to the COVID-19 crisis. A healthy dose of scepticism is a good thing. But, as the quote implies, intelligence is also marked by a willingness to accept a truth even if you disagree with it and the truth is, masks work, social distancing works and so does washing your hands and staying home as much as possible. Who cares how this whole damn thing got started? It's up to us to finish it.

Interestingly, soon after writing this article, I read a tweet about a new initiative known as ?ScienceUpFirst,? an ?awareness and engagement campaign? that will use social media to counter a concerning ?rise in misinformation and conspiracy theories related to COVID-19 vaccines, virus transmission and government response.?

The campaign suggests ?misinformation is a dire, imminent threat to the lives of all Canadians and is proven to be one of the factors fuelling Covid-19 infections, and dissuading Canadians from getting vaccinated.? It seems I'm not the only one concerned about fake news.