

On The World Watch

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Over 15 months ago, we watched with some trepidation and a few dismissive thoughts as a new virus emerged in China. Surely, we thought, this isn't good but we remained confident China would get things under control.

Quite quickly it appeared this would not be the case and we watched with more fear and fewer dismissive thoughts as Italy started down COVID-19, by then a raging out of control monster that saw life and death triage decisions being made in the Italian ER. South Korea, Iran, the list continued to grow and still we watched.

Now the world is watching us and with good reason. They are watching the abject failure of a nation to handle a crisis that has truly reached epidemic proportions. We've gone from watching, to the watched, as the world (and our fellow Ontarians) ask how it's possible we've learned nothing from the countries that came before us and are now at grave risk from a virus that knows no borders?

As has become glaringly obvious, despite the best efforts of the people with actual experience in managing deadly diseases, you know doctors and scientists our ICUs are overflowing and field hospitals (field hospitals!) have been set up outside of several major health centres. Canada, and specifically Ontario, has become the new epicentre of a really bad episode of M*A*S*H with Doug Ford assuming the role of Klinger. The only problem with this analogy is Klinger was smart and faking it, while with the Premier it's becoming increasingly more challenging to decipher.

In a blog released by the Broadbent Institute last July, the difference between the importance of paid sick days, particularly for minimum wage workers, was explained. These are the folks we are calling front line heroes, but treating like disposable Lysol wipes, needed in the moment but quickly used up. They are who keep our manufacturing facilities open, the grocery store shelves stocked and our products shipped. They are also the folks who are disproportionately falling victim to the virus. Demographics suggest these too are the people who may live in multi-family homes or in other similar group circumstances such as renting a room in a house with others, who in this case are strangers. In other words, they can't work from home, can't afford to take time off and yet potentially put family, housemates and co-workers at risk if they're ill.

The report rightly went on to explain how the current federal sick benefits (CRSB) don't adequately address the needs of these frontline support workers because of qualifying periods of employment, wait times (up to 4 weeks processing) and wholly inadequate income replacement, not to mention concerns around job security. The only thing that has changed since last July is the virus has gotten worse, significantly so. When Toronto Mayor John Tory says there is a desperate need for paid sick days, and critical care doctors point out that it would cost \$114 to cover one day of paid sick leave for a minimum wage worker, [vs.] the cost of caring for one critically ill COVID-19 patient for one day in intensive care [at] anywhere between \$3,500 and \$5,000? it shouldn't be that hard to figure out the math.

If Conservatives generally hold themselves to be fiscally responsible, whether or not they care about our health, from a monetary perspective paid sick leave just makes good sense. Who are the Conservatives really answering to during this pandemic? Why, in just in the past few days, did Peel Region Mayors, including our own Allan Thompson, have to publicly plead for assistance with helping to manage this crisis? Peel Region isn't just a hot spot, it's on freaking fire!

Meanwhile, the world watches.

In a Washington Post piece, David Moscrop wrote that Premier Ford's latest actions (including the closing, since retracted, of playgrounds) implied a seesaw is a greater threat than a fulfillment center or, at least, that outdoor recreation and the physical and mental health that comes with it are less important than moving goods. He called for the Premier to resign.

Al Jazeera quotes Canadian palliative care specialist, Dr. Naheed Dosani as saying, this entire humanitarian catastrophe should

never have happened, [it] was entirely preventable,? and not too long ago the US actually issued a travel advisory about Canada! There are no adequate words! Remember when we watched what was happening south of the border with disdain and smugly pontificated, ?that could never happen here?? Looks as though much like Ford has had to backtrack on closing playgrounds and granting special powers to the police (that's a whole other article) the average Ontarian will now have to backtrack on our assumption that the provincial government would never let us flounder. The world is watching us, and our Premier should be ashamed.