

## Ontario - ?Open for Business,? but not much else!

by SHERALYN ROMAN

To no one's shock or surprise, a recent email I received from big pharma confirmed what we have all known for some time now ? that healthcare is being offloaded to the private sector.

While all pharmacists are now able to diagnose and write prescriptions, it's the local red and white chain owned by Mr. Weston who sure seems to have a handle on being first in line to capitalize on this venture.

Much like he has done in the past, Mr. Ford wishes to push something off the list of government responsibilities, downloading it to someone else, who maybe, just maybe, might make some money doing it. Witness, for the defense, Covid testing for travelers (free in many parts of the world but not here) or providing ?free? menstrual products to local schools. It's all ?free? until it isn't and by then it'll be too late. Ontario is open FOR business, FOR profits, and while we are at it, we are open FOR developers too. In other words, Ontario remains open for business as usual, but if you need anything else, you'll be waiting for a long, long time.

Recently, I drove a sick family member to three separate walk-in clinics. They were ill enough that we believed a prescription would be necessary but certainly not so sick as to clog up a hospital emergency waiting room. All three clinics were open, but none were seeing patients.

Empty waiting rooms, a receptionist greeting people, but our only option was to call for a telephone appointment. Perversely, if I call my family doctor for a telephone appointment, I can't get one and have to be seen in person. Something to do with how appointments are being paid for by the government, we were told. Now that we know, courtesy of an FOI request, that Minister Jones' Transition Binder included specific references to the dwindling number of nurses and other healthcare workers negatively impacting the province's ability to adequately provide healthcare, (about which she did nothing) I can't help but wonder what else it said?

Was there perhaps an entire chapter devoted to how to make residents think they have access to health care by keeping walk-ins ?open? but also ensuring they were useless? Was the goal to force us to overcrowded hospital wait rooms with not enough staff to meet demand? Then, when those who can afford to do so demand better ? I'm pretty certain a service provider will be magically waiting in the wings to speed up your ER visit. For a fee that is.

Was there another chapter in the binder on how to annoy doctors and patients alike by demanding in person appointments for something as simple as a prescription renewal? Was the hope we would all get so fed up we'd demand pharmacists also be given the ability to renew a prescription? I'd bet good money on the fact this service will soon be available too ? once again for a fee. You get the idea - for a fee, there's a business in Ontario that's open, or opening soon, to take care of all your healthcare needs. For the record, if these private sector providers need nurses, as long as Doug keeps on fighting them in court he'll never have to give them the raise they deserve because they'll have no choice but to go and work for someone who WILL pay them fairly. I'm guessing Ford will see that as a win-win for Ontario too.

While writing this column I also had the opportunity to simultaneously listen in to the presentation of the Town's budget to Council members and anyone from the public who had a spare hour available to listen in. It appears we have an ?infrastructure deficit.? You know what else we have? An enormous amount of projected population growth to be accommodated that will require infrastructure! This growth is mandated by the provincial government but comes with NO opportunity to collect development charges from developers to build the infrastructure required to support it. Doug doesn't care, paying for roads and local garbage collection and parks is a local problem, ?not my responsibility? I'm sure he'd say while simultaneously accusing at least some municipalities of allegedly hoarding infrastructure funds. No worries though, he's opening up the greenbelt to be built upon and building a highway smack through the middle of it so all of his developer buddies will make lots and lots of money.

?See!? he'll exclaim with glee, ?We're open for business in Ontario, just like I promised.?

In case you're wondering about that Council meeting, which I'm sure is covered elsewhere in this paper, the Council is anticipating a 3.68% tax increase (not including any regional assessment.) That's a drop in the bucket compared to some municipalities but nothing to sneeze at when ?affordable? homes are deemed to be those costing \$1.2 million or less.

Also, it's potentially a tax hike that gets you very little in return because ? ?service level changes? are anticipated meaning there's nothing to be happy about. ?Not my problem, blame your local municipal officials,? Mr. Ford is bound to exclaim. Besides, as another FOI request also revealed this week, Ford and his communications team are too busy editing Dr. Moore's statements to the public to be worried about tax hikes at the municipal level. It seems while there is no money for healthcare, there was plenty of time to edit emails about healthcare. As a result, it was ?not always possible? for our Chief Medical Officer of Health to have the final say on his statements to the public - you know, about health?

Speaking of health, all you Covid deniers may wish to exit stage right. That's because there's a new variant in town and it's not messing around. At least according to scientists and the World Health Organization that is. I'm not sure Ontario got the memo because it's laser focussed on being open for business. My final question is this: When Covid runs out of people on which to test its variants, and businesses run out of workers as a result, will Ontario still be open for business?