

Someone Call 911

by SHERALYN ROMAN

It's been a while since I went on a rant but I'm not sure how much longer we can avoid talking about the elephant in the room. Make that not one but rather, two excessively large beasts who, despite their size, have somehow managed to retain a complete cloak of invisibility throughout these lazy, hazy days of summer ? except while out on the golf course that is. While the world grapples with the upsetting news that our Prime Minister takes a two week vacation to Costa Rica (insert sarcasm emoji) in Ontario no one seems to know, or care, where our Premier is currently hiding out OR what has happened to our new Minister of Health Sylvia Jones? Perhaps she's currently in a 20-hour long triage wait at Headwaters Hospital experiencing first-hand the disaster that is our health care system? Someone call 911 because we are in deep, deep trouble.

I'm not opposed to anyone taking a holiday. We all need a break from the reality of life once in a while and why should a Premier, a Prime Minister or even a Health Minister be denied? These past few years have been excessively trying times. However, no larger fact than this remains: When you sign up for public office, you sign up for ?better or worse.? You assume a mantle of responsibility to the general public who elected you (or in Ontario's case, the 40% of the 40% who actually voted) and that means when the health care system is literally collapsing around you ? you come back from the cottage, or the golf course fundraising event for your friends and you DEAL with the crisis. Enough is enough. Our hospitals, nurses, doctors, everyone has reached the absolute limit of their capacity and emergency rooms are closing, ICUs are closing (ICUs!) and now even several Obstetrics and Delivery units were forced to ?redirect? which means, if you need clarity, they are closing. This is madness and if you don't recognize it as such you are clearly a remarkably healthy, non-birthing person who has also never been in any kind of accident requiring emergency care. Lucky you.

Socialized medicine has long served our country, and many other progressive nations around the world who recognize that the common good is upheld by the common good of the people. In other words, healthy people who are able to work, not worry about their health, access treatment in a timely manner and also not have to worry about going broke in the process, are ultimately healthier, happier citizens who help to maintain the common good of all. You might think that even a Progressive Conservative would recognize that investing in health care is actually an investment in the economy, this being the only thing they really care about (other than highways, of course). But, no, it seems the ?drive to privatize? has taken priority, for how else are we to explain the complete lack of appropriate funding to hospitals, the egregious refusal to pay nurses appropriately or why hospitals must continually fundraise and seek donations to obtain needed equipment like MRI machines, or incubators or even, at one point, PPE!

Ms. Jones, you absolutely MUST come to the table to address this crisis in healthcare. Call your boss back from the cottage if you need formal permission to do so. It's time to repeal Bill 124 which not only governs nursing salaries, by the way, but also disproportionately impacts income capacity in a variety of female dominated professions. Bill 124 is specifically designed as a ?wage-suppression? measure to cap wage increases at 1%, which is below the current rate of inflation and the bill limits bargaining ability. As well, it's not just nurses who are impacted but teachers too, although the disaster that is education is enough for a whole separate column.

The bill also applies to agencies in the non-profit sector who receive a minimum of \$1 million in funding from the government, including Children's Aid Societies. If you're sensing a pattern here it's because there is one. These professions and/or agencies are often female-led, female dominated and serve the marginalized, the sick, the homeless, the disabled, our CHILDREN and our seniors. One can't help but draw several conclusions from such a piece of legislation.

One, that people who are disadvantaged and potentially less able to contribute to the economy as a result simply don't matter to the PCs and two, that female-dominated professions often serving these communities also don't matter. Retention of workers (or lack thereof) has reached epidemic proportions with nurses leaving the profession in droves. There is only so long being called a ?hero? but being treated like someone who is greedy and ungrateful, will sustain you. It doesn't after all, put food on the table what with current food costs rising astronomically and all this is happening while you struggle daily to care for patients in an environment that

no longer even respects your right to protect yourself with a simple mask from a potentially life-altering virus. (?Yes Virginia ? COVID still exists.?)

The elephants are actually hiding in plain sight. We can see daily what's happening. Hospitals closing, surgeries cancelled, nurses quitting and turning to literally any other job than nursing. It's the Premier and our Minister of Health who are missing and it's their unwillingness to treat the people doing the hard work every, single day, with dignity and respect, that's on full display. If ever there was truly a time for a mass protest in the streets, it's now. Every person in this province will, at some point either directly or indirectly be impacted by the Conservative government's choice to decimate our health care system.