

## A different standard



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By Nate Smelle

While driving home from a recent meeting with Kelly Wallace of the Think Turtle Conservation Initiative at one of the turtle mortality mitigation sites south of Bancroft on Hwy 62, I was reminded of the time of year when I switched on the radio and heard my first Christmas carol of the season. With a self-imposed limit on the time I am spending in public spaces I had yet to experience the usual decorations, music and other seasonal provocations that tend to appear after Halloween.

Thinking about the holiday season and how different it will be this year, I wondered whether the stores would remain open if the number of cases and death toll from COVID-19 continues to climb. If Ontario even comes close to half of the 6,500 daily new cases projected by the province for mid-December should we not implement additional preventative measures, I cannot see how any politician could logically argue to keep stores open throughout the Christmas season.

Of course the key word here is "logically." Looking at the behavioural patterns of many of our elected officials, one might say that the words "logically" and "politician" do not belong in the same sentence. For example, how is it that Independent MPP for the neighbouring riding of MPP Lanark?Frontenac?Kingston, Randy Hillier is allowed to openly encourage Ontarians to defy the government's preventative public safety measures - wearing a mask, closing non-essential businesses, social distancing, etc. - without being penalized for his reckless use of power? Why is it that Conservative MPP for Niagara West Sam Oosterhoff did not even receive a slap on the wrist when he Tweeted images of himself posing with dozens of partygoers while not wearing a mask or social distancing?

Do the words and actions of those we elect not matter?

If our elected officials are not wise enough to lead by example, then they should be made an example of by those who are.

Heading into the holiday season, we need to ready for a different type of celebration this year. As nice as it would be to shop until we drop as we usually do, the possibility of having a venue to do so is becoming less likely every day, thanks to the careless resistance of elected officials like Hillier and Oosterhoff. The example they have set for those who respect their opinion adds to the pandemic's grim tally of lives lost, and is reflected in the rising numbers.

According to a recent report by the CBC, RCMP officers have issued 77 fines ranging from \$275 to \$1,275 to people for not

respecting the measures in place to slow the spread of the pandemic. Why is it that we are alright with allowing our elected officials to be held to a lower standard of justice?

Should they not at least be held to the same standard as all Canadians?

Through their mis-guided self-interest, Hillier and Oosterhoff's actions and inactions are putting all of us in danger. By encouraging their followers to ignore the advice of Canada's top health-care professionals they are doing their part to make sure that more Ontarians will not be in the mood for celebrating this Christmas. Furthermore, every time they cast doubt on the sound science guiding our government to responsibly respond to this public health crisis of epic proportions, they are also jeopardizing our economy.

Considering these so-called leaders are fully aware that they are putting our lives and livelihoods at risk for their own personal political gain, if anything they should be subject to a higher standard than the average Canadian. Not holding our elected representatives accountable for their lack of leadership, especially when they are spreading misinformation and conspiracy theories that are spreading a deadly pandemic, is criminal. It is also a slap in the face of the nearly 12,000 Canadian families that will have an extra seat at their dinner table this Christmas.