

A shot in the arm



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By Nate Smelle

With the first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine entering the veins of Canadians on Monday, Dec. 14, there is a new sense of hope unlike any other experienced since the pandemic flared up in Canada 10 months ago. For many, news of the vaccine's arrival in Canada is a welcome booster, appearing as the first sign of light at the end of the long, dark tunnel of 2020. However, not everyone is breathing a sigh of relief yet.

Personally, I find myself in the pool of Canadians welcoming the hope this much needed shot in the arm delivers. But, at the same time I still find myself holding in that sigh of relief. Not because I doubt the safety or effectiveness of the vaccine - the swine flu vaccine only took six months to develop, and it proved to be both effective and safe. Instead, the reason I am still holding my breath are the obstacles preventing the eradication of this virus.

The biggest, most dangerous of these stumbling blocks is not the fact that this morning [Dec. 15] Ontario added a of 2,275 confirmed cases, and 20 deaths to its morbid scorecard. Nor is it the almost unfathomable scope of the worldwide vaccination that needs to take place yesterday. As with every crisis, the most deadly factor at play here is misinformation and the propensity for stupidity of those resisting measures in place to protect us - lockdowns, masks, physical distancing, and handwashing.

For more than five decades, the fossil fuel industry - with backing from right-leaning politicians eager to fork over billions of our tax dollars in annual subsidies - has actively promoted climate crisis denial and inaction, despite the very real threat 97 per cent of the scientific community agrees it poses for the future of humanity and the planet. In no way is this campaign of misinformation harmless. Through the lies and distrust in science it spreads, those behind this assault on truth have done their part to fuel global heating to the point where now an estimated 150,000 people die each year as a result of the increasing number of extreme weather events caused by the rapidly changing climate.

Anyone who reads this column on a regular basis knows that this is not the first time I have drawn attention to the connections between the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis. Interestingly, in a hilarious but potentially catastrophic way, every time I highlight ties connecting these crises, I get bombarded with emails and messages from a tiny group of people - mostly members of the anti-mask, anti-lockdown, pro-death movement - belligerently and falsely claiming that both of these game-changing crises are a hoax; and, that we should fire up our hummers and get back to business as usual.

This is where the brief moment of amusement I receive from their ridiculousness ends, and their blind faith in unfettered capitalism as a cure-all tonic for all crises begins to become a real danger. Whether we are talking about solving the climate crisis or ending the pandemic, we cannot consume our way out of the dire circumstances we find ourselves in at the moment. The only way we can overcome both of these crises is through change.

The type of change I am talking about cannot be found in a new outfit, haircut, or in your pocket. I am talking about a fundamental shift of the reigning paradigm akin to what philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn would describe as a "scientific revolution." That my friends will take more than a mask, or a return to what we once considered "normal." To bring about this level of change will require a new more communal way of seeing and interacting with the world we are a part of.

If people are willing to embrace this transition, the COVID-19 vaccine will help us move past the pandemic. But, if the campaign of misinformation regarding COVID-19 and the vaccine is not snuffed out, the death toll will continue to rise to record proportions.

Those we elect to represent us need to step up and speak out against the falsehoods being spread by the pro-death movement. Our leaders, provincially, federally, and locally - that means you MP Derek Sloan, MPP Daryl Kramp, and every council member throughout Hastings-Lennox and Addington - need to roll up their sleeve and take the vaccine publicly. In doing so you can join the fight against this campaign of misinformation; and help to instill public confidence in science and the vaccine it has produced for the benefit of humanity.

Unfortunately, there is no vaccine, no shot in the arm we can take to cure the climate crisis. That solution will require rolling up both sleeves, and getting to work on building a society that values its home planet as an essential element of our existence as a species.