

What a steal!



By Nate Smelle Hockey season is over. Canada Day is in the rearview mirror, and summer is now officially in full swing. Almost all the blackflies in North Hastings have been devoured by the winged multitude of dragonflies that descend nightly at dusk, but the mosquitoes are still feasting with a vengeance. For the first time since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the winter of 2020, it genuinely feels like we are embracing what some critical observers have tagged "the new normal." While the number of tourists visiting North Hastings may not have returned to pre-pandemic levels yet, gauging by the traffic in downtown Bancroft over the Canada Day long weekend, travellers appear to be regaining their courage to explore. Having been cooped up within the concrete confines of the city where many Ontarians have lived for the majority of the past two and a half plus years, an unprecedented level of anticipation has been building among travellers in regard to their summer vacation plans. As I am sure many tourism operators in Ontario's Cottage Country would agree, along with these mounting expectations there also appears to be an unspoken tension harboured by travellers in desperate need of a little rest, relaxation, and a change of scenery. After enduring so much fear and uncertainty as a result of the pandemic, it is fair to say that every one of us deserves a vacation. However, just because everyone of us is in need of time to get away and celebrate being alive, doesn't mean everyone of us can afford to take the time off. For those of us lucky enough to live in Cottage Country, it doesn't take much time or money to have a world class tourism experience close to home. No matter where you might find yourself in North Hastings, in every direction a public beach, provincial park, or backcountry recreational trail is only a short trip away. The Ford government says its temporary Ontario Staycation Tax Credit for 2022 aims to encourage Ontario families to explore the province, and stimulate the tourism and hospitality sectors recovery from the financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the tax credit, Ontario residents can claim 20 per cent of their eligible accommodation expenses up to \$1,000 when filing their personal Income Tax and Benefit Return for 2022, and get back up to \$200. For those planning a true staycation, however, it offers nothing to local travellers who decide to explore their own community or neighbouring communities during the day, and sleep in their own bed at night. Furthermore, with rising gas prices and "shrinkflation" squeezing us dry every time we pull out our wallet, for many, any plans for a much needed relaxing staycation will have to wait. Until when? Who knows? I suppose that will depend on when we figure out the mysterious cause of our failing global economy. Without a smidgen of good intentions or proof, the anti-Earth crowd will point a finger at "left-wing socialist extremists" hell-bent on carbon taxing us to death, as the reason for the current economic crisis. In actuality, the carbon tax only costs Ontarians about 11.1 cents per litre of gasoline. That means, at the current price of \$1.96/litre if the government were to say "forget climate change, forget the future, let's scrap the carbon tax all together", we would still be paying around \$1.85/litre. What a steal! Right? Most definitely! But next time we fill up at the pump we must ask ourselves, who is robbing who? Is a \$1.85 price tag on a litre of gas that much of a bargain when the world's leading oil giants took in record profits during the first three months of this year? In the first quarter of 2022, Shell's earnings climbed to \$9.1 billion from \$3.2 billion during the same period in 2021. BP brought in \$6.2 billion in profits, more than doubling the \$2.6 billion it made in the first quarter a year earlier. Exxon Mobil also doubled its profits in the first quarter of 2022, raking in \$5.48 billion. When is enough, enough? Why are we hunky-dory with burying billions of our hard-earned tax dollars in the tar sands each year through subsidies, when so many Canadians are living

cheque-to-cheque?Our skyrocketing cost of living has absolutely nothing to do with having too many environmental regulations and programs of social uplift. The sooner we come to terms with the fact that corporate greed is responsible for the ongoing crisis of affordability, the quicker we can get on with building a better future.