

It's been one week...since we distanced each other

CRC <CRC@crockwood.org>

Thu 2020-03-19 9:11 PM

To: CRC Newsletter <CRC-Newsletter-No-Reply@crockwood.org>



Something to think about...

I'm sorry we had to miss meeting with everyone in the community last week to discuss the Hidden Quarry decision, but in retrospect we are convinced we made the right decision to avoid any possible risks in light of the COVID-19 news and upward trajectory of cases.

Among the things we wanted to discuss was forward-looking strategies. As you know, we've been working with Wellington Water Watchers who have demonstrated huge support for CRC's work to protect water and the environment. Mike Balkwill helped us orchestrate our public flyrock and water campaigns last winter and spring, and inspired us to seek new ways to bring political attention to the very serious implications of predatory aggregate companies working in a policy framework which does not protect communities and environment.

You will read below Mike's letter written in this moment which combines, ironically, physical isolation with a dramatic lesson in our social/natural connection...it is the context for CRC's next steps and our ongoing collaboration with the intrepid team at WWW. Food for thought!

Take care, everyone! And stay tuned!

wellington *Water* watchers.ca

Last week WWW made the decision to cancel scheduled campaign meetings. Today it looks like it may be several weeks, if not months, before the spread of the coronavirus is contained enough to safely again hold public meetings. We are revising our Say No To Nestlé campaign plans and to support communities fighting to protect water in their communities, while not being able to hold public meetings. **We will have ideas to share with you soon.**

Everyone's immediate priority is containing the spread of the virus while supporting our families, friends, neighbours and coworkers. The coronavirus pandemic also provides lessons and opportunities on how to organize to deal with the climate crisis. The purpose of this message is to share how the pandemic may create the political conditions to expand public support for action on climate change and ensure water is for life not profit.

Pandemic forces governments to act quickly in the public interest: The actions of all levels of government in the last week are happening at a much faster speed than we see for the climate emergency. It may yet turn out that important decisions to contain the coronavirus were made too slowly – nonetheless coordinated actions in response to the health crisis are happening very quickly.

There are three reasons for the rapid response of government to the pandemic. First, the **crisis is visible**, local, undeniable and broad in scope. People are getting sick and dying. The spread of the coronavirus in other countries is being reported in real time through a variety of news and social media. The cascading consequences of the pandemic are visible. Social distancing is causing unemployment and social isolation now. The majority of people in our society live from paycheque to paycheque and are either feeling the impacts now or see that they will feel them soon. We can see that some businesses and industries may not recover from the loss of customers.

Second, federal, provincial and municipal governments are **listening to public health officials** and implementing their recommendations. Politicians appear to be 'listening to the science.'

Third, politicians recognize there will be **big political consequences** if they mismanage this public health crisis.

We have an opportunity to make links between the pandemic and climate crises, and the value of making decisions based on science. The political 'muscle' we flex to demand urgent response to the pandemic are 'muscles' we will be able to use again to demand urgent action on climate change too.

The pandemic is a 'teachable moment': The pandemic is visible. It is not an abstract idea based on modelling or events on a faraway time horizon

- Global events are having visible local impacts now with consequences that ripple out.
- The disproportionate vulnerability faced by some groups – e.g. homeless, elderly, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities – is being revealed as systemic, which is increasing social compassion and public demands for action on behalf of these groups.
- Visible sacrifices are being made by public sector workers. It is evident to all that health care workers are putting their own wellbeing at risk to take care of the public. Public awareness of the value of a wider range of public

services - such as care giving, grocery store workers, sanitation workers and more – is also increasing. This is creating social solidarity that people can see and feel.

- People are taking active roles, from shopping for their neighbours to singing with each other from balconies. This gives people strength as well as hope.

Why are governments acting (or at least aware they must appear to act) so quickly to protect the public interest? There are two very important reasons the government is moving to act (or at least appearing to act) in the public interest.

One reason is the **fear of political consequences of NOT acting in the public interest**. The public has a shared expectation that an important role of governments is to protect against threats to public health. In Ontario the waterborne gastroenteritis in Walkerton in 2000 is still part of the public memory. Although the impacts of that outbreak were small in comparison to the current pandemic – Mike Harris' PC government never recovered from mismanaging that crisis.

The other reason is that **the public is making demands!** Already we have seen the Ontario government remove the need for workers to provide sick notes from doctors – cuts they made early in the early days of their government – and have ended evictions. There is LOTS more the Ontario government needs to do but these initial wins are a result of advocacy groups making specific demands. As the health, social and economic crisis deepens we must make clear and specific demands on all levels of government that link the pandemic to the climate emergency.

Time to Expand Demands to Protect the Environment: Doug Ford's has used the 'Open for Business' as an excuse to cut public services and remove regulations that protect the environment. The pandemic, and the obvious effectiveness of the public health response will make it a lot harder for Premier Doug Ford to defend private interests over the public interest. This creates an opening for a wide range of demands in the public interest.

Ford's government might also try other ways to exploit the crisis in favour of private interests on some fronts during the pandemic. Naomi Klein's description of [the shock doctrine](#) strategy means we must remain vigilant to that possibility.

Summary: The pandemic is dangerous. It also demonstrates that governments are able to act on public demands and take bold actions to combat imminent and serious threats to public health and collective well-being when they fear the political consequences of not taking action.

While we focus on the immediate health crisis, we must also begin to think about how to link it to demands that the Ford government treat the climate emergency as seriously. Our demands can include restoring environmental

protections Ford's government has cut and taking new bold and urgent actions to 'flatten the curve' of the climate crisis.

We are working on a plan on how to engage with you and all our supporters around these demands through online methods. We will keep in touch with you.

Mike Balkwill
Campaign Director

Wellington Water Watchers
<http://wellingtonwaterwatchers.nationbuilder.com/>

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