

How quickly things have changed

EDITORIAL

WHAT A DIFFERENCE a week makes.

While it's true that this time seven days ago, the World Health Organization had officially labelled the global COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic, the far-reaching impacts of the contagious virus had yet to truly take form in Canada.

In the space of the week, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has twice announced travel restrictions for people looking to come into Canada, essentially closing the border to all but Canadian citizens and permanent residents, called on all Canadians who are overseas to return home, and unveiled an \$82 billion stimulus package designed to help families and small business owners through the tough times that are undoubtedly ahead of us.

That latest move was, perhaps, in part a response to Ontario Premier Doug Ford declaring a province-wide state of emergency on Tuesday. The announcement came hand-in-hand with a mandated closure of all dine-in facilities at restaurants across the province, movie theatres, bars, child care centres and recreation centres until at least the end of March. This followed another statement, last Thursday, when Ford directed all publicly funded schools to close until April 6.

If it wasn't already clear to you before, this COVID-19 outbreak is a big deal. More than 200,000 people have been infected worldwide, with over 8,200 recorded deaths as of press time. Originating in China at the end of 2019, the novel coronavirus has spread at an alarming rate. It has decimated large parts of Europe, which is now considered the global epicentre for COVID-19.

Just about everywhere, attempts to contain the virus have failed. And in a big way, too. Many European nations, notably Italy, reacted too late to early cases, allowing the virus to spread like wildfire throughout their populations. There is a fear that same failure will soon be identified on these shores.

While Canada's borders are now closed, and a shutdown of most non-essential services has been ordered in Ontario, they both come at a time when there are more than 500 confirmed cases of COVID-19 nationwide.

Here in Dufferin-Caledon, there's just one confirmed case thus far. Municipalities have reacted swiftly in recent days to close off public facilities, while all major events and gatherings have been postponed, or cancelled. The response may be a little late, but it's better than nothing.

The concern now for many people will be finding money to put food on the table, and keep a roof over their head. The federal government yesterday announced aid will be available to Canadians, but just how far that will go to support people who have lost their livelihoods in the past 72 hours remains to be seen.

These are stressful times. Many food stores have been pillaged to the point that even the most basic items, such as toilet paper, bread and milk, are, seemingly, on the verge of extinction. An exaggeration, to be sure, but you understand the point. Stock markets are tanking, people are losing their jobs. For all the worrying about health and safety, the state of the economy over the ensuing weeks and months may be even greater cause for concern.

But truth be told, there's not really much we can do on that front right now. What we can do, as a community, is keep our composure and remember what it is to, well, be a community. That means we stop the hoarding. We stop the senseless panic buying. It's important that we help our neighbours during this time. Simply applying a 'me over everyone' mentality will only serve to fracture the feeling of togetherness the people of Shelburne have worked to build up over several decades.

So, let us lend a helping hand, where we can, to the people who need it most. Let's remember what got us to where we are today.

Let's remember what it means to be Canadian.