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MPP Sylvia Jones expects ?a new normal? once COVID crisis concludes

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The Ontario government has officially begun the first stage of reopening the province, as of Tuesday (May 19).

This first stage includes reopening outdoor spaces, such as recreational and sports facilities, multi-use fields, off-leash dog parks and other recreational areas. Apart from the lifting of these restrictions, all emergency orders have been extended until May 29 to keep the public safe. This includes bars and restaurants and continues to limit social gatherings.

?Although we are entering the first stage of our framework to reopen the economy, it's critical that we continue to do so in a safe and responsible manner,? said Premier Doug Ford. ?The people of Ontario have been doing a fantastic job to help flatten the curve and stop the spread of this terrible virus. With warmer weather beginning, individuals and families will now be able to enjoy many outdoor amenities, but everyone must continue to maintain physical distancing from those outside of their household.?

Sylvia Jones, Dufferin-Caledon MPP and Solicitor General, spoke with the Free Press this week about the gradual reopening of the province and what the future may look like.

?I'm not going to delude anyone into thinking that it's going to happen very quickly. I think that we really have to be very careful to continue to watch the numbers of how many new cases have been tested positive,? she said. ?We also have to continue to rely on the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. If we push it too quickly, then I'm very concerned that we will end up being in a situation where we have a major push-back and nobody wants to see that.?

As of Tuesday there are over 23,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the province, with 1,919 deaths. In total, 17,898 individuals who have had the virus have made complete recoveries. As several businesses have been selected to reopen this past weekend, a spike of over 400 new confirmed cases were announced on Monday.

What the next year will look like is hard to predict, but MPP Jones sees a ?different normal?, where safety is heightened in all aspects of our lives.

?I think what you will see going forward is that businesses and manufacturing firms will have, for lack of a better word, a new motto. There are things that we will expect as employees, as customers and as owners, that we need to make sure we're protecting people when they come into our facilities. We're already seeing those changes with plexiglass and shields at check-outs. It would not at all surprise me that those continue to be in place moving forward.?

She added, ?Frankly, if that's what we need to make sure that our families are protected and our employees are protected, then I fully support those changes.?

Many members of the community have reached out with concerns that the province is reopening too quickly, or not fast enough. The process of relaunching the economy is being spread out over three stages, with each stage within two to four weeks of each other.

?There are people that would like to see us move forward faster, and there are those who are concerned. I've spoken to a number of healthcare practitioners who want to make sure that they're not going to be overwhelmed, because there's a net increasing community spread,? explained Ms. Jones. ?I think the ongoing focus and concern continues to surround our loved ones who are in long-term care settings and what I call conjugate settings, so group homes and prisons. Anywhere where people are living in close quarters together becomes a concern, and we have to put extra measures in place to protect those individuals.?

Working as MPP and Solicitor General, she has an overflowing plate of work ahead of her. She is grateful for her team and associates who are working alongside her to help coordinate each sector of her job.

?I literally have to remember what day of the week it is,? she explained. ?The days are packed. There is a lot of activity going on at the cabinet level, at the caucus level. Frankly, at the Solicitor General level, we've been working around the clock. I have to give a thank-you and a shout out to the people who work in the ministry, the people, my staff who've continued to help people over the phone and on email. I have been pretty blessed, and I guess I'm one of the lucky ones that I have all my family at home with me, so I'm not worried about a spouse or child who is sheltering somewhere else. I've been blessed that way because it's one less thing not to have to stress about.?