

“Ask not what your country can do for you, but what can you do for your country”. President Kennedy’s inaugural address to this day stands the test of time. At a time when rising Cold War tensions dominated the landscape, and the world was in a state of unrest, President Kennedy made a call to every American to stand united. To stand in honour and fight for the well being of the United States. To give back; to a land whose very independence and strength was rooted in the values of prosperity, freedom, and hope. As together, no challenge is to great, no hurdle to grand. This is the thinking we as Albertans should hold during this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. It is in every individual to help slow the spread, protect the elderly and our most vulnerable, and help end the virus as quickly as possible. However, in times of crisis, Albertans look to their leaders, in both government and industry, to help lead the march and continue the fight against the virus. Every measure taken during this time will, at a later date, be scrutinized and reflection will take place. It is important for us to look back at such measures and ask ourselves questions of significance. To ask ourselves what more could have been? What else could have been done? Not only to bring peace to those we have lost, but to prepare ourselves for any future battles. Objectivity is needed, even required, for such a task. We can not stand divided; conservative and liberal, youth and elder, black or white. We stand united, as Albertans above all else.

As we surpass the curve and the virus begins to fade, in memory of all who lost their lives, we as a people must come together and look to what was done. It was back on the 31 of December 2019 that the first cases of suspected “pneumonia” were reported by the Chinese government [1]. After incredibly controversial moves by the Chinese, including jailing Li Wenliang, the doctor who first sounded the alarm of the danger of the virus [2], only a small IMST (Incident Management Support Team) was sent to report in Wuhan [1]. It was not until the 13 of January 2020, almost a month since the initiation of the outbreak, that the communist Chinese regime publicly shared the genetic sequence of COVID-19 [1]. The WHO did not classify the virus as a pandemic until the 11 of March 2020, almost 3 three months after the first cases [1]. Without knowledge, the Alberta government was blindsided as COVID-19 began to sweep Europe and eventually gained a stronghold in the United States. As more research was conducted on the strain of the virus, it was found that the virus was most commonly spread from human to human transmission. That is, an infected person who still remained in circulation, was likely to infect most, if not every, person they directly interacted with. Bearing this in mind the question is blatant and must be asked; why were borders not immediately shut down? With over four months of time passing from the first recorded cases in Wuhan, the potential threat that infected individuals had travelled worldwide leaving a trail of infections was incredibly high. A closure of all borders and restrictions on all nonessential travel would have allowed Alberta to cut itself off from the possible COVID-19 trail, limiting the possibility of transmission and infection. As the Prime Minister utterly failed to close borders and limit travel, it must be said that Premier Kenney also did not react quick enough. To this day, no travel restrictions have been enforced in the province, leaving the possibility of community transmission even higher. A more decisive and legislative approach that would limit provincial travel would have been able to contain the virus and not continue to spread it through our communities, limiting the possible number of Albertans dying due to the virus. Uncontrolled migration and unchecked movement

within the country put more Albertan lives at risk and left us a more complex and dangerous situation to resolve and battle.

In concurrence with limiting travel to control the virus, the recent and newly introduced “social distancing” rules must also be looked at. These new guidelines have been introduced by AHS (Alberta Health Services) and the federal government to “slow the spread” of COVID-19. In Alberta specifically, these new guidelines outline the steps taken if you have entered the province or returned from travel, taken ill and are showing symptoms, and or have come into contact with someone infected with the virus. The guidelines state that a self-isolation period is required by law and a 6-foot distance must be maintained between individuals [3]. Although these guidelines have been in effect for over two weeks, this has not completely prevented people from breaking the rules. The only enforcement the government has put on these laws are a 1,000 dollar fine for an offence, which increases to 100,000 and even 500,000 thousand dollars for repeated or concurrent violations [3]. This is simply not enough. Human beings are social creatures, our brains are designed to seek company and we are made to live in groups. To simply state that we must keep our distances and remain home “or else”, serves no purpose. Aligning themselves with police, the Alberta Government should have enacted stricter and harsher penalties for those who fail to comply with social distancing laws. Although strong handed, these penalties would act as a deterrent. Along with this, stricter penalties would also draw attention to the issue. As previously stated, the state media did not begin to report on COVID-19 as a serious pandemic until after three months when the WHO denoted it as a worldwide pandemic [1]. Attention to the fact that people will die if we do not take these precautions brings seriousness to the issue. A threat of jail time and a criminal record would imply that these guidelines have been set in place for a reason, and that our actions of breaking them have serious consequences. A lack of serious penalties has allowed this pandemic to not be treated as seriously as it should be. This has prevented the lowering of transmission rates in the province, which has caused more people to fall ill and have their lives at risk. The enforcement of these laws should have been more stringent to raise awareness to the fact that Albertan lives must be protected through a joint effort of all Albertans.

In Alberta, many public and private institutions, enlist or require large groups of people to be in close contact with one another. Schools, daycares, universities, restaurants, stores, and malls are all possible epicentres for the spread of the virus. Building off this, Alberta was one of the last provinces to shut down all schools and universities; this was an avoidable mistake. Already having the knowledge of how the virus is most predominantly transmitted, the realization that an outbreak in a local school could wreak havoc in the community, should have been enough for the Kenney government to take measures. However, no action was taken until almost 56 new cases had arisen within a one-day span [4]. Closing schools, universities and daycares this late, again allowed for more time and possibility for the virus to spread. Many children and young people, according to AHS, may be infected with the virus, however displaying no symptoms; they are simply carriers. Allowing classes to continue again extended and deepened the threat of more community transmissions. Along with these things, non-essential restaurants and services were still allowed to operate. This once again puts lives at risk. Large multinational corporations, such as McDonald's, Burger King, Sport check, or Best Buy,

have the monetary power to close without consequence. Small business also has the ability to apply for federal benefits and compensation for closing their doors. There is simply no excuse for even allowing the virus the chance to continue to spread. The virus does not discriminate, it does not care how or via what means it is transmitted. The Alberta government should have shut down all non-essential business in quick succession and kept them closed until the pandemic peak has fallen. The economy is a separate issue and comes in second when comparing it to the lives of everyday Albertans. An economic downturn can be fixed, a dead loved one can not. Falling stock prices can bounce back, while a terminally ill patient may not be so lucky. It is also worth mentioning that the longer the virus prolonged itself, the more time the economy must remain closed. If these business and services had been forced to shut down earlier, limiting the spread of the virus to an even more significant extent, the virus perhaps would die out at a quicker pace than leaving business half open, being better for the economy in the long run.

To finally eradicate the virus, full transparency and honest communication must be made with the public. The communist Chinese have once again pushed propaganda that has put millions of lives at risk. Through US intelligence, it has been determined that China has lied about the number of COVID-19 cases in the country and underreported the number of deaths [5]. This does harm across the globe as countries like Canada may then have false hope that the source country is surpassing the virus, and in turn relax measures taken regarding social distancing. The Canadian government must stand firm with our American allies and seek the truth from the Chinese. Politicizing this virus is morally wrong. As Albertans along with many others lose their lives, we must state the facts and act on them. Tough questions must be asked by the Canadian government before any measures are removed from the current COVID-19 response. The Canadian government should have questioned the Chinese months ago, before this pandemic spiralled out of control, as honesty of how the virus is transmitted and how deadly it truly is, could have saved lives here in this country.

There is no question that this pandemic has taken the world by storm, and that only a coordinated effort by all people will defeat it. Albertans have experienced hard times in the past. We always come out the other side stronger than before. United we must continue to fight this virus, and together we shall defeat it. In the words of Sir Winston Churchill, “*Success is not final, failure is not fatal. It is the courage to continue that counts.*” In this, our darkest hour, we must stay committed to one another and remain hopeful. Every individual has the power to make a difference, and no lives lost in this battle will be in vain. We must stand, as we always have, proud and together, until we vanquish this invisible enemy. God bless Canada, God bless Alberta.

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