



Alternatives North

Introduction to Pandemic Columns

The COVID-19 crisis has resulted in major changes in our way of life in the NWT, across Canada and across the planet. People who work in non-essential services started working at home. Physical distancing has become the norm and returning travellers have self-isolated. Within three weeks, we went from homeless people being hosted at shelters to being housed in independent units with a managed alcohol program.

Numerous attempts are being made to reach out to the vulnerable among us while following the public health orders. Caremongering YK has 1439 members and numerous requests for assistance are posted daily. First Nation or Community councils are providing cash or food hampers to members. Businesses are finding ways to continue to serve their customers safely. We have a sense of all being in this together.

The pace and size of these changes around the world have brought amazing changes. Our lifestyle has slowed down (except for front-line service providers for whom we are forever grateful). Most travel has stopped. Airlines are grounding planes and laying off thousands of workers.

People are applying for needed help through a broad range of new public financial support programs. Canada is spending \$27 billion through its economic response plan to help individuals and businesses impacted by the pandemic including almost \$130 million for the 3 territories to help health-care system, airlines, businesses and Nutrition North. The GNWT has put together an initial economic relief package valued at \$21.5 million dollars. It seems when we need to, we can find the funds to adjust to a new reality.

The air we breathe is cleaner in parts of the world and pollution has decreased. China saw a reduction of 25 per cent in its carbon dioxide emissions during its lockdown. Italy and Spain reduced their emissions by around 20 percent and their electricity loads went down 10 per cent. New York City dropped its CO₂ levels by half and this is most obvious at rush hour.

But when this crisis is over, how will we react? Will we throw all this progress away in a rush to “get back to normal”? There are many lessons that we can and should learn. How do we want to go forward from this pandemic? What changes do we want to keep? What principles will guide our actions? How will we define our “new normal”? How can we build a more equitable and sustainable world without falling into the pitfalls of the past?

Alternatives North would like to explore this theme with you in a series of commentaries. We will explore how we can do a better job of caring for people, and the natural world that supports us, through related topics like universal basic income, climate change, reinventing our economy, housing homeless people, healthcare, food production and getting people back to work. Let's explore how we can continue to build resilience in our people and for the North.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Suzette Montreuil". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'S' at the beginning.

Suzette Montreuil
For Alternatives North

Yours sincerely,