

May 25, 2020



**TO: All Toronto & York Region Members of Parliament
(Individually addressed)**

Every day we see new steps taken to address COVID-19's implications for Canadians. Funding, programs, policies, regulations – each of these is put to work fighting the health crisis while providing basic protection for many working people and our communities, and businesses, across Canada. Thank you for your continued attention to these issues.

As so many point out, this pandemic has shone a spotlight on a number of areas that – predictably – exposed the weaknesses and inequality embedded in the fabric of our society. On behalf of our Labour Council's affiliated unions and our 220,000 members who work in most sectors of the economy, we will continue to communicate with you on ways of moving forward to rebuild as well as identify the areas that are in clear need of repair.

We should consider using our responses to COVID-19 as a flashlight for the path we can take permanently, not just as a temporary stopgap measure. We see what government can do. We see what is needed. The ongoing path needs to be about fairness and justice as much as about economic stabilizers. As we seek a different "normal", it cannot be "business as usual" that we strive for.

As Canada continues the rescue phase for dealing with COVID-19, we ask you to do the following:

- Hold corporations to account for wage subsidies and wage top-ups. One hundred per cent of these dollars should be given to workers. To ensure this is the case, at minimum, companies should be required to be transparent and communicate to their employees that funding has been received.
- Implement sound rules, and consider taking stakes, when corporations get loans or any kind of bailout. The announced conditions for the loan program are a good start, but the conditions related to tax avoidance need to be tougher. The aim should be that these loans are a last resort for companies and only go to companies with good behaviour. We all remember what happened around the 2008/9 financial crisis.

In the meantime, we await announcements regarding these issues:

- Emergency funding for municipalities, including stressed transit systems, by the federal government as well as a new deal for cities, as outlined by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities
- Further action to force banks and financial institutions to lower their credit card interest rates well below the 10.9 per cent that most are offering – an issue you are hearing about from groups such as ACORN (Association of Communities Organizations for Reform Now)
- Fill gaps for those who need income support through CERB and CERS, as well as the need for longer term reform of the EI system as espoused by the Good Jobs For All Coalition's EI Working Group
- Expand paid sick leave for federally regulated workers

At the same time, the work of Cabinet ministers tasked with crafting an "economic recovery plan that aims to accelerate the green shift" must integrate repair and rebuild components in order to foster recovery that is equitable and green. The following are key elements in repairing our economy:

- Expand migrant rights
- Call a public inquiry into the meat packing and food processing industries
- Better regulate internet service to make it more affordable
- Where federal powers allow, bring in strict regulations governing the gig economy

In the rebuild phase, the following are crucial:

- Make a just transition the cornerstone of our green economic recovery
- Incorporate the ambitious, feasible and necessary initiatives laid out by the Canadian Labour Congress in it's May 13, 2020 ***Labour Priorities for Economic Recovery***.
- Act on the CLC's call for the overhaul of the long-term care system, ***Lessons from a Pandemic***
- Make effective supply chains a key part of a thoughtful, forward looking industrial policy
- Implement a program of tax fairness. Fair taxes start by closing loopholes. In his plea to protect journalism in Canada, Public Policy Forum's Edward Greenspon also touched on the "absurdity of foreign digital giants enjoying more favourable tax treatment than Canadian media."

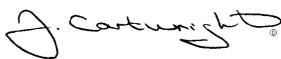
A spotlight is being shone on the important work done by journalists in the mainstream news media who have shown the critical importance of asking tough questions and reporting factual information. As the Toronto Star's public editor wrote on May 2, 2020, "the COVID-19 crisis is making clear to people around the world the fact that the journalism created by a free and independent press is vital to our health and safety, indeed, to our staying alive."

Yet Canadian newspapers are closing or suspending print editions – more than 50 of them since COVID-19 hit hard, and hundreds in the previous years. We lose good jobs along with shrinking the free press. Among the solutions is to follow Australia and France's leads and make sure Google and Facebook pay for copyrighted content and sharing the advertising dollars and data that flow from the content.

The Toronto & York Region Labour Council calls on each of you to continue your leadership and ensure our society is more equal – not less – in each phase of dealing with COVID-19. We continue urging you to show utmost care for workers and communities, maintain social solidarity with the goal that no one is left behind, and recognize that Canadians start from different places.

We recognize it will be challenging for you to work towards these goals as pressure to return to an austerity model increases. We know those who benefit the most from austerity will be urging a return to their normal. But Canadians want a better future based on economic and social justice. Please reply to let us know what steps you are taking to achieve these goals.

Sincerely,



John Cartwright
President

c.c. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
Andrew Scheer, Leader of the Conservative Party
Jagmeet Singh, Leader of the New Democratic Party
Elizabeth May, Leader of the Green Party
Toronto and York Region Mayors