

THINK 2020 IS TOUGH?

2021 SHAPING UP TO BE EVEN TOUGHER



By Ray Pennings
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As we enter the final quarter of this year, many Canadians are likely more than ready to say goodbye and good riddance to 2020, the year of the pandemic. But what if, in some ways at least, 2021 could actually be even more difficult?

Consider this: Besides killing nearly 10,000 Canadians and more than one million people worldwide, COVID-19 has wreaked a huge economic wound on Canadians, their businesses, and their families. The pandemic has left many in serious distress.

The federal government, like many around the world, responded immediately with emergency financial assistance and loan programs, whose acronyms became quickly familiar to those in need: CERB (Canada Emergency Relief Benefit), CEWS (Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy), and CEBA (Canada Emergency Business Account), to name just a few. A new report from the Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) now projects a budget deficit of nearly \$329 billion, 15 per cent of gross domestic product. (This doesn't include proposals announced in the recent throne speech.) It also takes for granted that the virus and public health measures will remain fixtures on the horizon for the next 12 to 18 months. The PBO calculation, however, assumes that the emergency spending measures will end when this fiscal year ends.

Some version of most of these programs, like CERB and CEWS, were urgent and needed during the shutdown to weather the biggest economic crisis Canada has experienced since the

Second World War. As of late last month, nearly nine million Canadians have applied for CERB and the government has paid out more than \$80 billion to those who qualified.

Across all sectors of the Canadian economy, including construction, manufacturing, education, health, hospitality, retail and others, more than one million applicants for the wage subsidies have received over \$37.4 billion through the CEWS program.

Small businesses received \$1.32 billion in rent relief while many of their employees were working from home, and their doors were closed or their operations were at reduced capacity. More than 70,000 businesses received CEBA loans totalling more than \$18 billion in interest-free loans of up to \$40,000 for eligible enterprises and non-profits.

Charities and food banks received an additional \$425 million more to support community services to Canadians affected by the pandemic.

At some point soon, these programs will end because such extraordinary spending measures will no longer be sustainable. When the government's miraculous money faucet is turned off, what happens next?

As we move into 2021, many will face a tough, uphill climb. Families, businesses, and charities will be pursuing recovery as many of the supports they depended on for survival will no longer be available.

It may be a shock to the system, much like what a patient in hospital feels when recovering from surgery and the morphine drip for pain management is suddenly no longer there.

Will charities have the additional support of increased private giving to make up what's lacking

Will the retail or hospitality sectors revive without stronger consumer spending when life-support emergency measures are no longer in place?

What will be the effects of the second wave with a second shutdown and more targeted

measures to contain the spread and flatten the curve?

In budgeting for 2021, many will start well behind their 2020 actuals as the government support plus the customer activity that was facilitated by government support will not be available. Like pain killers, these supports masked the true depth of the COVID-19 damage.

As we go through the transitions of the coming days, some yet unfelt pains will have to be endured together.

However, this is ultimately not about doom and gloom predictions or forecasting in fear, but about keeping a watchful eye on the trends and trajectories that will shape our common life. Looking through the same lens, COVID-19 has opened the eyes of many to the need for real change that seemed impossible before the great pause of the pandemic.

Workaholic parents now at home pay new attention to the needs of their growing children. There's a new focus on racial and other injustices that have surfaced during this time of shared trial. We have a growing awareness that despite our many differences, we can't avoid being connected in more ways than we previously realized.

The move from 2020 to 2021 could refocus our vision and practice in new ways not only at the personal level, but also at the broader public, societal level.

When we witness government becoming too overextended in ways that are ultimately harmful, the opportunity or urgency will be there to refocus the government on its core mission of what it can singularly do well.

It will require a right-sizing of government or returning to balance that will include paying renewed attention to the health and contributions of other institutions, like families, schools, churches and religious organizations, and more that have their own equally important and critical contributions to make to the hard work of recovery and renewal of society in the days ahead.



WELCOME HOME FOR LESS Homemade Solutions EMERGENCY SHELTER PODS

Written by,
Sharleen Cainer, BSW RSW

Welcome Home for Less will be presenting their plan for emergency shelter pods to the council on November 24th, 2020 to some members of the Durham Region. This is an initiative to create short term emergency housing for individual occupation this winter. The cost of this project is dependant upon the cooperation and commitment the council would like to give to its development, I am going to

explain how and why.

1. First of all, where will we put these pods? Durham Council in their push to establish a residence for 50 people who are not homeless in a yet to be built facility in Beaverton, has brought forward 3 other possible sites to be examined for the purposes of building a residence. Welcome Home for Less, initiating a market survey has elected to visit these sites to determine viability.

2. Locations are as follows, Oshawa, Pickering, and Curtis. They are large enough parcels of land to be able to erect as many micro pods as the council wishes to erect. Land wise it is possible to house all of Durham's homeless population.

3. The payment for this land could be paid for by land lease, as the micro pods are prefabricated and can be moved from the land base as required. The Federal government has recently granted an extra \$157 million to divide between the provinces for the sole purposes of addressing the homeless crisis.

4. The next item on the agenda is zoning. Generally speaking, land is either zoned for commercial, residential, or commercial residential. The other aspect of zoning is that it changes all the time. Some lands were residential and then became commercial. Some lands were rural farming and then became scheduled to become an airport, for those of us that remember the Pickering Airport calamity.

5. The final item on the agenda in terms of building, is cooperation between the two parties. By this we mean transparent, sleeves rolled up, best intention forward, all for one, one for all cooperation between Welcome Home for Less and The Durham Regional Council. Now I am sympathetic in that the council may feel somewhat forced to come to the negotiating table as a direct result of losing the last hand at the poker table, but we assure you, Councillors, we are here to improve the lives of a very large sector of the population, The Unsheltered. Communication and transparency with Durham Region are paramount on this issue, and unfortunately, they suffer spectacular barriers in achieving transparency on this regard.

We at Welcome Home for Less are understanding of this emotionally charged disability that often cripples politicians. Nobody wants to air their personal or professional internal workings out to the public, which can only invite criticism. There is a skill set and a talent that comes with leading the charge and creating positive change for all the people.

Welcome Home for Less will be partnering with other community initiatives that work to serve and protect the unsheltered, so as to provide its members to regain a respected position in society and realize their full potential. I can hear you all asking yourselves, "what is she talking about and how is that going to work out?" Well, we are here to tell you it is going to work out very well, providing we can all talk, communicate, and initiate.

When ever we talk about the unsheltered, people seem to rush to the OMG-THEY-ARE-DRUG-ADDICTS-AND-CRIMINALS ideology. If that were true, then why is it that with Covid 19, the homeless population has exponentially increased? It is because of social, systemic issues. The cost of living has risen beyond the capability of most people to create savings, or a nest egg that can last more than a month or two. There are several published studies holding the thesis that we are all one paycheque away from financial disaster. This would be why the Prime Minister put up \$157 million for emergency sheltering. Oshawa has access to \$10 million for this very purpose.

In 2009, Durham region published a document where they were seen to have 3 goals. The number one goal was as follows.

1. END HOMELESSNESS IN DURHAM REGION. For which they have 2 objectives: a) develop long-term innovative approaches to improve the ability of households to access housing, b) develop long-term innovative approaches to improve the ability of households to retain their housing.

This initiative was published in 2009, using the parameters of 2014 to 2024 as the destination for the end of homelessness. Yet here we are in 2020 and I am not referring to 2020 vision. The homeless population is growing and not decreasing. In a discussion with Reverend Roy from First Light, he stated that homelessness will never end, because the issues that created a homeless reality for many are still here, and as people cycle out to be sheltered in a new home, there are more people who, due to systemic and social issues become homeless. Welcome Home for Less is not only in the business of sheltering the unsheltered, but we are also fully capable of addressing the social and systemic issues. What we require for success is cooperation, partnerships, and for everyone to row the boat in one direction. Welcome aboard, General Health as we fight the war against homelessness.

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