



June 29th, 2020



To My Constituents of Simcoe-Grey!

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our lives in many ways. Even those of us who have been able to continue working have had to make changes to our daily routines. As your Member of Parliament, the changes have been dramatic. The government has cancelled regular parliamentary proceedings, which include the daily Question Period. Instead, it has relied on a smaller, mostly virtual COVID committee.

But while much of the usual routine has changed, the workload has not. In fact, my office's in Alliston, Collingwood and Ottawa have seen a huge spike in the number of constituents needing assistance. My offices have remained open these past three months, often past usual business hours and on weekends, as my staff and I have put the time in to meet the surge in demand.

When COVID-19 was officially declared a pandemic and borders were closed around the world, many of our friends and neighbours were stranded across the globe. We have successfully assisted in bringing home hundreds of Simcoe-Grey residents who were stuck in places ranging from Morocco to Peru to India to Guatemala to Ecuador. In fact, in the past few weeks we were able to assist another two constituents return home. One returned from Trinidad and one from the Philippines.

We have also seen an influx of requests from small business owners who are trying to make rent and keep their employees paid, while having little to no income coming in. Seniors have reached out needing help navigating bureaucracy, or help getting prescriptions and groceries. Many workers who have lost jobs and find themselves stuck in one of the many gaps in the government's response plan have reached out for help. We've succeeded in finding almost all of them assistance and we continue to work to find solutions for those who still need help.

Throughout this pandemic, we have also continued to do the usual functions of an MP's office such as provide citizenship and congratulatory certificates. I was happy to personally present certificates (from a proper distance) to two Simcoe-Grey couples who have celebrated their 60th Wedding Anniversary during the pandemic: Keith and Mary Foster and Wilfred and Amena Oudit. It has also been a pleasure to meet many new Canadians who have made Simcoe-Grey home and present them with certificates of congratulations for becoming citizens of this great country.

We have helped local businesses retrofit operations to support the COVID-19 fight. From getting permits to produce hand sanitizer, to finding space to produce PPE, my staff and I have been there from day one. I have personally delivered masks to local frontline workers when the call went out. One constituent, who called our office when there was a run on toilet paper in the shops, found that I dropped a few rolls off on her step later that day! It certainly isn't always a glamorous job, but when my constituents need help, that is what I was elected to do.

When I am not on the phone with those needing help, I am on video calls connecting with fellow MPs where we exchange ideas and plan strategies to push the government to fix its programming. Or I am virtually sitting in with local organizations planning for the return to business. I have been working closely with MPP Jim Wilson throughout the pandemic. Recently he and I co-hosted a very helpful virtual small business roundtable. Within the past couple weeks, on behalf of the Blue Mountain Village Association I was able to connect with Small Business Minister Ng's staff to push for changes to CEBA to help that important tourism destination in our riding survive.

I have also been participating in the COVID Committee which has replaced Parliament. During the in-person sessions in the House of Commons, I have questioned the government over support for municipalities, encouraged it to improve high speed internet in our riding, urged it to fast-track assistance for dairy farmers, and pushed it to provide real assistance for commercial tenants struggling to pay rent. Via Zoom during virtual sittings of the Committee, I have asked about support for seniors, demanded answers on the gun ban and pressured the government to have the Patent Medicine Price Review Board stand down on its proposed restrictive guidelines which would make the lives of those suffering from Cystic Fibrosis even harder. Happily, thanks to pressure from my colleagues and I, as well as from Canadians affected by CF, the government has postponed the proposed changes.

On the positive side, it looks like we are slowly reopening Ontario. As the quarantine restrictions have been lifting, I have been out in the community supporting local businesses. Take Out Wednesdays have proven to be an effective way to support local

businesses; I treat my staff and I every week. But whether it is Wednesday or not, I have been trying to support and publicize local businesses as much as I can.

If you're reading this and own a local restaurant offering take out, send me an email so I can add you to our list, I'd love to hear from you! If you are not the owner of a local business, restaurant or tourist destination in our riding I encourage you to shop local, eat local and vacation local this season, they need us more than ever!

As you likely know, I come from a municipal background. As the government closest to the people, I always ensure that I keep in contact with mayors and councillors. So as Ontario has been reopening, I have been reaching out to municipal leaders from across the riding and will continue to do so.

As I have been meeting with local leaders, I have also stopped into many local businesses or attended virtual or social distance events. I was happy to see the Alliston Farmers Market reopen. Our agriculture sector has faced some unique challenges because of COVID-19 and I have been staying in touch with producers throughout the pandemic. I'd also like to say thank you to the Essa Historical Society for inviting me to your Nicolston plaque unveiling.

I have been happy to participate in raising awareness for Multiple Sclerosis and Alzheimer's through Social Media and have been honoured to participate in events honouring frontline workers. My Lake Simcoe colleagues and I were also successful in backing the government away from its plan to shut down international usage at Lake Simcoe Regional Airport.

As your MP, this summer will be unlike those before. The events and appearances you expect from your elected leaders will be significantly reduced, postponed or – at best – scaled down. But to ensure I connect with as many of you as possible, I will be reaching out in different ways. One way is this new electronic newsletter, which will be send regularly. I will also be making phone calls in lieu of door knocking. I also encourage you to visit my social media pages, where I provide regular updates about Ottawa and Simcoe-Grey.

As the economy gets back to normal it is critically important that we evaluate and learn from this experience. I will be pushing the government for a number of answers. There have been many questions raised about whether government decisions about the pandemic were made fast enough. There is a lot of concern about whether programs have provided the right amount of assistance or whether there have been too many

gaps. I know this because many constituents have contacted my offices and I asking for assistance with problems they were experiencing with the programs. The government did make several changes to improve programs, but there are still many gaps and flaws. I welcome hearing from constituents who have had experience with COVID-19 relief programs whether they have been effective or not. We must be prepared for the next time something like this happens.

If we have not yet connected in person, then let me thank you for your help in making me your Member of Parliament. These first months have not been what anyone could have expected, but there is no greater honour than representing you and fighting for you in Parliament. Let's hope that Ontario and Canada get back to normal as soon as possible. I wish you all a very Happy Canada Day and I look forward to connecting with you all via social media, the telephone or social-distanced in person.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Terry Dowdall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Terry Dowdall
Member of Parliament for Simcoe—Grey