

# Ontario Health Coalition

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Attn: Assignment Editor

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## **Public Interest Groups Deeply Concerned About Undemocratic Process, Drummond Commission & Public Service Cuts**

Toronto – The McGuinty government is planning sweeping public service cuts and restructuring without public input and proper democratic processes, public interest groups revealed in a press conference this morning at Queen’s Park. The groups are concerned about the Drummond Commission, which was created by the McGuinty government to make recommendations to cut public services and budgets.

Don Drummond, a well-heeled member of the Toronto elite, has strong links to private health care interests and lobby groups. He has adopted a highly political role, conducting rounds of media interviews to sell his proposals even before the Ontario Legislature has had an opportunity to receive his report. At the same time, Premier Dalton McGuinty and Health Minister Deb Matthews are launching major policy changes through speeches to exclusive executive and corporate audiences.

The McGuinty government, which has been elected with a minority, failed to forge an agreement with opposition parties to set up the Standing Committees of the Legislature during the Fall Session. As such, there is no Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and no Pre-Budget Hearings. In a minority government, the ruling party does not hold a majority on the standing committees. These committees have real powers to amend legislation and hold public hearings.

The coalition and public interest groups argue that the process is manipulative and inappropriate.

“Drummond is an extremely wealthy retired bank executive and does not in any way represent the values and needs of regular Ontarians. He selected a very narrow elite of hospital executives and pro-privatization lobbyists to consult while he was writing his report. When we and a few other groups met with him in early December – at our request - the report was already written,” noted Natalie Mehra, coalition director. “Despite no mention of these plans during the election only a few months ago, the McGuinty government has forged a mandate for the Drummond Commission that is extraordinarily biased towards privatization. It has virtually no public interest principles to protect the fairness and equity of Ontarians’ public services.”

“The Ontario Liberals’ budgeting and policy-making process in the past few months violates every democratic, open, good government principle,” added Duff Conacher, Board Member and Founding Director of Democracy Watch. “The public paid for the Drummond Report, yet the government has shut down the legislature without forming legislative committees, without any open hearings and without public input into the major policy changes ahead. As a minority government, the Liberals must compromise and be more open and democratic.”

“The Drummond Commission will be recommending a fundamental restructuring of how Ontario’s public services are produced and delivered. It would be unprecedented, given the magnitude of change envisioned, if a broad public consultation did not take place,” concluded Dr. Bryan Evans, professor of politics at Ryerson University.

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