

Ontario Health Coalition

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Save Public Medicare! Information Monday, November 21, 2005

97% of 8,824 People Vote to Keep North Bay s Hospital 100% public:

Ontario Health Coalition Result of Saturday community-wide vote on plans to introduce a privatized P3 hospital in North Bay were announced in a press conference this morning in North Bay. The results are as follows:

Ballot question:

I support a North Bay and District hospital that is 100% non-profit, publicly owned and publicly operated.

Yes Votes	8,545
No Votes	249
Spoiled Ballots	30
Total	8,824

Putting the Vote in Context:

- North Bay city councillors were elected with between 5,000-9,000 votes each.
- The population of North Bay according to the North Bay website is 53,000 including children.

Based on these figures, we estimate that between 1 in 3 or 1 in 4 adults voted. This is a tremendous turnout for a citizen-called plebiscite and shows keen community interest in the issue.- Monique Smith, Liberal MPP won her seat in the entire riding of Nipissing (an area considerably larger than that covered by the plebiscite) by approximately 16,000 votes.

What Was Said:

We are thrilled with the enormous turnout. We have more votes than almost all of city council! said Mickey King, North Bay Health Coalition co chair. "The vote of the citizens of North Bay is absolutely clear: we want no part of for profit corporations managing, maintaining or taking over any other part of our non profit hospital. With this huge vote we are sending an impossible-to-ignore message to Monique Smith, and Dalton McGuinty. Monique Smith, I ask you today to agree to take this message to you colleagues in cabinet and caucus: build our hospital publicly.

"People in the North Bay area exercised our democratic right and clearly voted against privatization," stated Shirley Ferron Retired Registered Nurse who volunteered to collect votes. "Our community is holding Dalton McGuinty accountable to his pre-election promises."

"We will move on and hold votes in community after community, moving tens of thousands of

residents to tell our government that we want the P3 privatization of hospitals stopped. Dalton McGuinty has no mandate to do this. The evidence is clear that this policy will cost more, cause cuts to services, and threaten the future of public Medicare. This message has been reinforced by 22,000 voters in the first two plebiscites, ” stated Natalie Mehra, director of the Ontario Health Coalition.

What Is Next:

The Ontario Health Coalition is working with local health coalitions to mount upcoming plebiscites as follows:

- Woodstock plebiscite – this Saturday, November 26
- Hamilton plebiscite – Saturday, December 10
- Sault Ste. Marie plebiscite – date TBA

Other communities are just beginning work on their plebiscites and dates will be announced in upcoming weeks.

Background:

Ontario’s provincial government has now announced 21 P3 hospital projects – despite running against these privatization schemes in the last provincial election. This is the largest attempt to privatize hospital assets and services in Canada’s history. The Ontario Health Coalition has mounted plebiscite campaigns in communities across Ontario to force the government to revert to cheaper public financing of hospitals, and to maintain all hospital services as non-profit. The first plebiscite in St. Catharines in June garnered approx. 13,000 votes, 98% in favour of keeping the hospital public and stopping the P3.

The Privatizers' Response:

The McGuinty government and pro-privatization forces responded to the North Bay campaign with an aggressive campaign that featured:

- government spokespeople spread confusion pretending that the P3 hospital was not a P3 and attempting to discredit health coalition volunteers by calling them names and insults
- a poll was published on the front-page of one local paper with a biased question that actually asked if people would strongly or somewhat support the private sector "helping out" with the construction of new hospitals! Despite a misleading banner headline and the biased question, the poll's results were so narrow that they fell within the margin of error for the poll.
- local college students' vote was shut down. Students were forbidden from handing out information, putting up flyers or voting in any areas of campus that contained people.
- false rumours that the vote was cancelled were spread. Two polling stations had anonymous signs put on them in the morning stating that they were closed down and the vote was cancelled. - local residents reported at several polling stations that the local Liberal MPP had told them not to vote. - in a communications strategy remarkably similar to that of Conservative Health Minister Tony Clement

- the local MPP tried to pretend that P3 privatization is not privatization. The government pretended that if the deals do not show "Value for Money" they would not go through, even while refusing to reveal publicly the value for money assessment before the 30 - 40 year deal would be signed. They misleadingly told local reporters that the deals would be transparent, failing to note that the commercial and financial parts of the deal will be shielded from public scrutiny.

Despite the aggressive tactics and the misleading information, the results of the vote were overwhelming.

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