

Ontario Health Coalition

MEDIA
RELEASE

October 29, 2001

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE **Attention: Assignment Editors**

Coalition: Senate Report Fatally Biased

Toronto - The Ontario Health Coalition, in partnership with other concerned community groups, are planning a lively protest today at noon at the Royal York Hotel: the site of the hearings into the future of Medicare for the Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology. The committee recently released a report titled, "*Issues and Options*" ostensibly about the options facing our health system. Coalition spokespeople called the report "fatally biased" noting that it ignores public options, really only looking in detail at options for creating two tiers and privatizing Medicare. The report was planned as number four out of five that the Senate committee intends to release but was released early, presumably to impact the work of the Romanow Commission. Senator Kirby, committee chair and Board member of Extendicare Inc. has been travelling across the country promoting privatization of Medicare in the national media and predicting the demise of the Medicare system if Canadians do not support his position.

"It is an outrage that this board member of a huge multinational private health company, not elected by anyone, and without bothering to provide a single shred of evidence to support his claims, is traipsing around the country using his Senate Committee position as a platform from which to tell Canadians that public Medicare is on its last legs and we have to privatize," charged Irene Harris, Coalition co-chair. "The irony of ironies is that he is proposing 'solutions' like user-fees and two-tier health care - the very things that worked so badly that they brought about the creation of public Medicare in the first place."

Three key items missing from the report:

- 1) The committee's paper suggests that Canadians over-use so called free healthcare services. It uses this presumption to justify a series of two-tier privatizations stating that Canadians need to be "trained or given incentives which help them discriminate between their true needs for health services and their desired demand." The report does

not bother to give any evidence that Canadians are - or if we are, to what degree we are - in fact, overusing the health system.

2) The report neglects to give any evidence whatsoever that a tier of profit-seeking health care would improve cost, efficiency or quality of care. It ignores international and Canadian evidence that two-tier Medicare makes waiting lists longer. It ignores the American experience of health care privatization - even though many of the same corporations would be in operation in Canada if we privatized. Similarly, the report ignores cost escalations in countries that have privatized healthcare, including Australia, New Zealand and the U.K. The report dismisses outright any possibility of taking a closer look at gaining efficiencies through containing or eliminating the privatization that currently exists - opting to dump the responsibility for system change on patients rather than on health care profiteers. Authors blatantly show their bias by lauding health privatization as "thinking outside the box."

3) The case for public financing of health care is not investigated. Instead, much ink is spent on a listing of all the ways the authors could think to privatize the financing of health services.

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