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For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

Premier Doug Ford Appoints Former Conservative Party President & Humber River Regional Hospital CEO as Health Care Czar: Coalition Expresses Deep Concerns

Toronto – Doug Ford has appointed Rueben Devlin, former president of the Ontario Conservative Party by “Order in Council” (Cabinet order) to be the Chair of a new *Premier’s Council on Improving Health Care & Ending Hallway Medicine* and Special Advisor on *Ending Hallway Medicine*. The positions come with a \$348,000 per year salary for the Conservative stalwart who was president of the party during the Mike Harris era during which the government spent \$3.9 billion closing and merging hospitals in an attempt to cut \$800 million from their budgets. That was most radical restructuring of public hospitals in the country’s history. At the time, the Harris government used a government-appointed “restructuring commission” to make the orders.

Rueben Devlin is also the former CEO of Humber River Hospital where he presided over the closure of three entire hospitals. The three were replaced with one privatized P3 hospital at an eye-popping \$1.76 billion due to the exorbitantly expensive P3 financing and privatization model. In so doing, Devlin closed down a hospital in one of the poorest neighbourhoods of the city. The new P3 hospital did not have enough capacity to serve its population and last fall the former Liberal government reopened one of the closed-down sites in order to deal with patients waiting on stretchers in hallways for care.

Devlin was recently interviewed in the media and parroted the same long-used health policies that have led to the crisis in access to care: more closure of hospital services and movement of services out to privatized sectors where patients face long waits, co-payments and user fees; no recognition whatsoever of the need to rebuild capacity in Ontario’s hospitals which are funded at the lowest rate in the country and which have had deeper bed, nursing and staff cuts than any other province in Canada. Devlin also focused much on “modernization” and the “hospital of the future” without any real substance reported on what this means.

“Ontarians don’t want to be greeted by a robot at the one privatized regional hospital left after all their local hospitals have been shut down,” noted Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition, alluding to the “modernization” at Humber River. “The discussion now has to be about rebuilding capacity – reopening beds and ORs, restoring funding – not centralizing, cutting, closing and privatization our local hospitals. We are deeply concerned and we are asking Mr. Ford to provide some reassurances about his plans.”

The Coalition is asking for the Terms of Reference for this new Council set up by the Premier. They are also asking for a clear commitment not to close and centralize local hospitals. Most immediately, the people of Windsor, Niagara and Bracebridge/Huntsville need assurances that proposals to close and centralize their local hospitals will be stopped. The Coalition is seeking assurances that the mega restructuring plan hatched under Tim Hudak -- to amalgamate all 146 Ontario hospitals covering 224 local hospitals into 40 -50 mega hospitals -- will not be imposed by this new Council or by the Ford government.

“What happened at Humber River Regional hospital was a massive gift to private for-profit P3 corporations and consulting firms at the expense of patients and the neighbourhoods that lost their local hospitals,” noted Ms. Mehra. “This cannot be the model for Ontario.”

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