

Briefing Note

Gordon Campbell – Canada’s Arch Health Care Privateer and Author of the Worst Cuts in B.C.’s History

Not only does he have an abysmal record on financial matters, but former B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell, whom Doug Ford appointed to lead the Independent Financial Commission of Inquiry in Ontario, is perhaps *the* biggest enemy of public health care in Canada. B.C. is now Canada’s ground zero for health care privatization and user fees charged to patients, mainly as a result of Gordon Campbell’s policies while in power.

It must be noted that Gordon Campbell wiped out a \$1.5 billion surplus he inherited when he took government, then went on to post the largest deficits in the B.C.’s history to that time, and he added significantly to the province’s debt. He has been lauded by the extreme right-wing Fraser Institute which has received funding from U.S. private interests and has relentlessly advocated to bring down public health care and other social programs in Canada.

Gordon Campbell’s record is among the very worst in the history of Canadian public health care:

- Attempts to improve health care under the public system were undermined as Mr. Campbell completely ignored the advice and recommendations of public health care advocates and opted instead to cut and privatize. The number and scope of private clinics mushroomed under Mr. Campbell’s tenure as he cut and closed local public hospitals. For years, his government turned a blind eye to private clinics charging user fees to patients for medically necessary services, including double-billing (billing B.C.’s public OHIP plan and billing patients too for the same procedures). These direct charges to patients are an outright violation of the Canada Health Act that bans extra charges to patients for needed medical care, and if double-billing is not criminally illegal it ought to be.
- Just recently, at the beginning of July, Mr. Campbell issued an affidavit as ex-Premier supporting private for-profit clinics in their fight to extra-bill patients in B.C. Mr. Campbell’s affidavit supports the private clinics’ attempt to get an injunction in court to stop the current government from imposing a regulation clamping down on the extra user charges they are billing to patients. Despite the obvious hardship caused to patients by thousands – or even tens of thousands -- of dollars in user fees being charged for needed health care, Mr. Campbell makes the outrageously false claim that the private clinics he supports do not damage Medicare. B.C. patients now face the most user fees for MRIs, diagnostic tests and surgeries in their private clinics of anywhere in Canada. They are charged hundreds to thousands of dollars for needed MRIs, and thousands to tens of thousands of dollars for needed surgeries.
- Mr. Campbell’s government brought private health care interests and other corporate interests in to take power over Regional Health Authorities. Then he brought in legislation to allow the contracting out of public hospital services. During his tenure there was mass privatization of hospital support and clinical services. Vital cleaning services were privatized along with food and other patient support services. As a result of privatization and the poor practices of the for-profit cleaning companies hospital infection outbreaks increased.

- Mr. Campbell cut taxes for the rich and for corporations, who called it “Christmas in July” and then undertook to pay for it by a massive campaign of cutting rural hospitals, closing schools, and decimating services including everything from the B.C. ferries to undertaking the largest mass layoff of women in the province’s history (due to his public sector cuts).
- He brought in privatized P3s (so called private-public partnerships, an exorbitantly expensive method of building public hospitals and other infrastructure through contracting private groups of companies that include private multinational financiers and banks, service privatizers and private consulting firms).
- Mr. Campbell acted in the interests of the private drug companies as well, going after the B.C. Therapeutics Initiative, attempting to axe their funding and close down their independent laboratory. The Initiative was a public watchdog, giving advice on drug safety and pharmaceutical policy. Campbell created a panel stacked in favour of the pharmaceutical industry to make recommendations on reform, then axed the funding of the Therapeutics Initiative and cut access to the primary database its researchers used. An international outcry forced Campbell to turn back some of these attempts to gut the Initiative.
- Under Mr. Campbell’s tenure there was major labour strife including grave problems negotiating contracts with doctors, nurses, health professionals and support workers. The worst health care labour relations in memory ensued from his policies. Thousands of front-line and patient support staff saw their collective agreements ripped up, their work contracted out, and their pay cut dramatically. When 43,000 hospital and long-term care workers went out on strike, Mr. Campbell legislated them back to work and imposed a 15% pay cut.