

Ontario Health Coalition

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ATTN: Assignment Editor

98% Vote to Keep Hospital Public in First Plebiscite to Stop P3 Hospitals: More than 12,400 Vote in St. Catharines

St. Catharines – More than 12, 400 people voted in a citizen-called community-wide vote held in St. Catharines and area on Saturday, June 25. The results of the plebiscite, called by the Niagara & Ontario Health Coalitions, were released today at 1 pm in front of the Hotel Dieu Hospital in St. Catharines.

In answer to the ballot question: “I support a new hospital for St. Catharines that is 100% publicly funded, owned, administered and operated. Keep our hospital public and non-profit.”

Number of people who voted: 12,442

Number of “Yes” votes: 12,164

Number of “No” votes: 215

Spoiled ballots: 63

On Saturday, community members lined up at polling stations staffed by volunteers across the cities of Thorold, St. Catharines and Niagara-On-the-Lake. Advance polls were conducted in schools, hospitals, auto plants, seniors’ homes and other workplaces across the community.

“This is real grassroots democracy at work. We are thrilled that over 12,000 people cared enough to cast their votes to keep our new hospital public,” said Sue Hotte, Niagara Health Coalition co chair. “The residents of our community have sent a clear message to our elected politicians that we are supporting our new hospital, but we want a public not a privatized hospital. We are now asking our MPPs to take this message to their caucuses and to cabinet and bring back a promise to keep our hospital 100% publicly financed, managed and operated.”

“This is the first plebiscite (community-wide vote) to stop the privatization of our hospitals, and we are overwhelmed by the response,” said Natalie Mehra coordinator of the Ontario Health Coalition. “We will use the St. Catharines model to work with local communities across the province to mount citizens’ votes to keep our hospitals public and non-profit. With such a tremendous response, the government will not be able to break its election promise to keep our hospitals public.”

Organizers were taken by surprise at the level of community response:

Residents lined up at many polling stations before they opened in the morning, waiting to vote.

Several polling stations ran out of ballots and ballot boxes were stuffed to overflowing. Extra volunteers had to be dispatched to bring them more while voters waited.

Patients in one hospital told staff they wanted to be able to vote, and extra volunteers were sent in with ballot boxes to accommodate them.

Seniors from one nursing home where the owner would not allow a polling station, left the home and crossed the street to vote at a station outside.

Over a hundred volunteers braved sweltering temperatures and late-afternoon thunderstorms to staff polling stations all day across the community. Volunteers drove from site to site with sunscreen and cold drinks to stave off heat stroke. Some polling stations had to be closed down early as lightening and rainstorms created dangerous conditions at some of the outdoor sites.

Voters brought their children and grandparents in from across the city to vote, some for the first time.

Phones at the main campaign office rang constantly with voters looking for polling stations and people walking or driving in off the street to vote.

Background

In May, the provincial government announced its intention to build up to 23 new hospitals using “innovative alternative financing mechanisms” or private for-profit financing. Private finance (P3) hospital deals include lease arrangements allowing the corporations to privatize lands, services, facility management and other parts of the hospitals to generate profits for the private corporations. The high cost of these deals has led to cuts in clinical budgets, reducing hospital beds, doctors, nurses and support staff and redirecting funds to for-profit multinational corporations. P3 deals have been plagued by bankruptcies, costly legal disputes and a raft of quality problems. Health coalitions across Ontario won a promise from the Liberal government to stop the privatization of the hospitals in the election. Since then, the Liberals have signed the first 2 privatized (P3) hospital deals in Brampton and Ottawa. The coalition has mounted the plebiscite campaigns to stop any further privatization.

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