

MRG to Premiers: Abandon the Firewall

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The Medical Reform Group today called on the Premiers, meeting to prepare their strategy for negotiations with Paul Martin, to accept the need for national health care programs.

“The narrow-minded selfishness of some Premiers could destroy our national, public health care system,” said MRG spokesperson Dr. Gordon Guyatt. “The Premiers must accept the federal government’s responsibility to ensure national standards, and accountability for the money it provides to the provinces.”

A group of prominent Albertans, including opposition leader Stephen Harper, called in early 2001 for a firewall that would allow Alberta to violate national policies, including the Canada Health Act. This firewall mentality continues to reflect the attitudes of some Premiers, including Ralph Klein and Gordon Campbell, as they call for federal money with no strings attached.

The firewall mentality both violates the will of the electorate in the last federal election, and the best interests of Canadians. All major parties in the election professed commitment to universal, high quality, publicly funded health care. Canadians voted overwhelmingly for parties most strongly committed to these principles. Polls show that even in Alberta, where Conservatives dominate both federally and provincially, the electorate is split between federalist and isolationist approaches to health care funding and delivery.

Publicly funded health care delivered by not-for-profit providers is both more equitable and more efficient than the two-tier, American-style approaches to funding and delivery that Ralph Klein advocates. The Romanow report recognized our need for national standards of care, national targets of health care delivery goals, a national home care program, and a national pharmacare program.

“It’s up to the federal government to ensure that federal health care money is properly spent,” said another MRG spokesperson, Dr. Ahmed Bayoumi. “That means national standards, and national programs, including home care and pharmacare. It’s up to the provinces to accept

the need for strings-attached money that ensures they will behave responsibly in keeping with the national will.”

“Canadians don’t want universal health care in some province, two-tier medicine in others,” Dr. Guyatt concluded. “They don’t want accessible home care and adequate coverage for prescription drugs in some provinces and not others. Canadians want national public programs that make high quality accessible across the country. The Premiers should realize that, and get on board.”

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