

An open letter to the Canada's premiers:

Labour leaders call on premiers to unite and defend healthcare

The future of Canada's healthcare system is at a critical stage.

As leaders of the provincial and territorial Federations of Labour, we are calling on the country's premiers, who are meeting in Victoria, to put forward a united front and stand up for Canada's universal healthcare system and the millions of Canadians who depend on it.

In December, the Harper government sent a clear message that it intends to abrogate its responsibility to defend national healthcare standards and universality. It plans to walk away from its responsibility to lead the negotiations to develop a new Health Accord. The current Accord ends in 2014.

Instead, the federal government has laid out a take-it-or-leave-it funding formula that will see Ottawa contributing a lot less to healthcare by 2017, tying increases in funding to economic growth.

This is an attempt by the Harper Government to hijack the real debate. The real debate should be how we tackle and bring about meaningful and positive change. The real debate must be how we build and enhance our public healthcare system. The current Health Accord has shown us that with stable long-term funding and common goals and targets, we can deliver better healthcare.

Our most valued social program – something that unites all Canadians – deserves a plan that tackles growing disparities in health outcomes and growing gaps in access to care.

While Canadians need to see stable funding for healthcare, there are also the issues of accountability, national standards and targets, equality of access and quality. How will these issues be addressed if the federal government washes its hands of its responsibility?

As provincial labour leaders representing workers from coast to coast, we appeal to you as premiers and provincial leaders. This is not just about dollars and cents it's about values – values that Canadians have embraced for half a century.

Values that include a publically-funded and administered healthcare system where all Canadians have access to the same quality healthcare regardless of income and no matter where they live in our country.

It's about a Canada where families with loved ones battling diseases that threaten their lives are not also forced to contend with poverty and inadequate care.

The next generation of Canadians deserves a high-quality healthcare system, not one starved for funds. Our children need to know that their right to decent healthcare is based on their rights as citizens and not the limits on their credit cards.

As Premiers, you are well positioned to stand up for all Canadians. As premiers, you are the frontline for all of us in the fight for adequate and sustainable funding that protects our healthcare system.

Some of you have come to the conclusion that the Flaherty plan will erode our universal healthcare system and values. We agree.

In fact, we believe the federal Conservative plan of further corporate tax cuts, on the one hand, and reduced funding for healthcare, on the other, will simply further reward the 1 Percent and punish the 99 Percent.

As premiers, you are discussing the very values that Canadians embrace: equality, fairness, access for all regardless of income.

Those who came before us created a healthcare system based on the solidarity of Canadians with each other. It is our collective duty to ensure its survival for generations to come. Unfortunately, what the federal government is proposing does not meet this test.

Now is not the time to be looking for a better deal for any individual province or territory. Now is the time to be united.

We ask you to reject the federal proposal, to reject a framework that leaves Canadians out of the discussion and to embrace the values upon which our nation and our healthcare system were built.

We are calling on you, as Premiers, to send a message not only to the Harper government and the Canadian public, but to the tens of thousands of workers who provide care to Canadians every day that you will defend healthcare.

At the end of your meeting, Canadians will ask a simple question: did their leaders take up the challenge to stand up for the health and the wellbeing of all Canadians or did they allow the federal government to erode the social foundation of our country? The choice, and responsibility, is yours.

Canadians are counting on you to make the right decision.

Respectfully,

The Presidents of the Provincial and Territorial Federations of Labour:

Jim Sinclair, British Columbia

Don Austin, Yukon

MaryLou Cherwaty, NWT and Nunavut

Gil McGowan, Alberta

Larry Hubich, Saskatchewan

Kevin Rebeck, Manitoba

Sid Ryan, Ontario

Michel Boudreau, New Brunswick

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