

Speaking notes

We are up against one of the toughest fights of our lives. It's the battle between public and private health care. And people are lining up on both sides of this fight.

We have tough opponents – corporations with deep pockets and friends in high places, politicians who rule on the basis of their ideology, not the best interests of the public, and international forces looking to open up our borders to the commercialization of health care.

But, as we all know, we have strong allies. Canadians, and CUPE members in particular, had an overwhelming impact on the public consultations chaired by Roy Romanow. People voiced their concerns on email, in letters and faxes not only to Romanow but to elected representatives as well.

CUPE members signed post cards, canvassed door to door and attended mass rallies to determination to protect public health care.

And why? Because people know how fortunate we are to have a strong health care system. People know we have to seize the opportunity as the federal government looks to make changes. People want to ensure that we have a sustainable system that will take care of us and our families.

We only have to look around us to be reminded of some of the reasons we need to care about what's happening to our health care system right now.

- South of the border, 43 million Americans are uninsured and another 50 million under-insured.
- In Australia, one private hospital cost \$93 million more than if it had been built within the public system, according to their auditor general.

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- In Britain, costs jumped with privatization and waiting lists got longer.
 - Last year, two million Americans and their families lost their health insurance because of layoffs.

Then look in our own back yard.

- Prescription drug costs in Canada increased three and a half times (344 per cent) from 1985 to 2000.
- Six (6) million Canadians have inadequate drug insurance.
- Private health insurance expenditures in Canada increased one and a half times (148.6 per cent) between 1988 and 1998.
- And a report released in May by the Canadian Medical Association Journal showed that death rates in for-profit hospitals are significantly higher than in not-for-profit hospitals. In fact, if Canada switched to for-profit hospitals over 2,000 more Canadians would die every year.

For these reasons and so many more, we need to take action like never before.

We have the opportunity to influence real change in public health care. We have to recognize our challenges and commit to overcoming them together.

That's why CUPE is making public health care the top priority of our union – in every sector, for every member, for you and your families.

And we're not starting from scratch. CUPE has been playing a leading role in the movement to protect and strengthen public health care in Canada.

- We have been the major opposition to privatization initiatives in every province.
- We have been very active in ensuring the voices of the Canadian people are being heard in the debate on health care reform.
- We have been active – locally, provincially and nationally – building a powerful coalition opposing health care privatization.
- We have been busy mobilizing workers across the country to protect and expand universal, accessible, affordable public health care.

Our campaign is entering a new phase as right-wing provincial governments move to privatize more and more services and the federal government does nothing to stop them.

- In Ontario, we see private hospitals and private MRI and CT clinics.
- In British Columbia, we see the government gutting collective agreements, closing hospitals and nursing homes, and laying off health care workers.
- In Alberta, we see approval of a new private hospital and the government embracing P3s.
- Across the country, we see cutbacks and contracting out, de-listing and more for-profit services.

With all the reports now in, we need to build strong pressure on the federal and provincial governments to move quickly to strengthen public health care.

The time for study has ended. The time for action is now.

- We need to step up our campaign work in the months ahead.
- We need to mobilize every union member, every citizen who relies on health care.
- This isn't someone else's issue – it's our issue – all of us, our co-workers, our children, our neighbours, our parents.
- We need to alert every health care worker about the looming threats of contracting out, lay-offs and substandard working conditions.
- BC has shown it's not enough to have good contract language. We need to protect that language and elect governments that will respect our contracts.
- We need to make those around us understand that public funding is not enough – every health care service must be publicly delivered.

CUPE is putting the full force of our union behind this campaign to protect and expand public health care.

- We have thousands of people to reach in a short period of time.
- If there is one unifying issue in this country, it's health care.

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- If there is one time where we need to come together to pressure the government to do the right thing – it's now.
 - We need to seize **every** opportunity to put pressure on the federal government to implement the changes needed to ensure we get the quality care we need.
 - We need to use **every** means to pressure the government – taking action in every way to tell all levels of government that we're serious about our public health care system.

And that's what we plan to do.

- We have joined with others to call for urgent action to reform and strengthen public health care.
- We need to work at the community level, in every community in this country, mobilizing pressure on our MPs and on our MPPs to fight against for-profit health care and demand increased funding for public health care.
- So we'll be organizing members, enlisting their support for action on health care.
- And with their participation we'll be active in provincial and federal elections, showing politicians our strength as they've never seen before.
- And we'll meet with employers and tell them we're determined to protect and expand public health care, and we'll fight any attempt to contract out or privatize services.

And this isn't just CUPE.

- Through the Canadian Labour Congress, unions across the country are mobilizing their members to keep up the pressure.
- Citizens from coast to coast to coast are working together to oppose government cutbacks and privatization of public services.
- We will continue to build a common front – a massive movement to push the government to do what's right for health care.

How can you help?

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- Talk to your co-workers, your friends and your neighbours about your reasons for caring about public health care.
 - Get involved in the workplace canvass in your local or your worksite.
 - Take the time to call your MP and MPP, to share your reasons for caring about health care.
 - Go to their offices to talk about your concerns and hopes for health care.
 - Attend a rally in your community to support public services.
 - Write a letter to the editor.

...The list is endless.

In the coming weeks, we're going to be organizing the workplaces in this community and we're going to be looking at ways we can apply pressure locally.

Your participation in this effort is key.

Remember, this is not someone else's fight. It's our fight. And together we can win.

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