

BULLETIN

Klein's Bill 11 galvanizes health care activists

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All eyes are on Alberta and the impact of Bill 11, the controversial health care legislation that passed third reading on May 11. I was attending the HSA Alberta Annual Convention the day following the Bills final reading and had the opportunity to hear directly from those who are working in the system.

What Elizabeth Ballerman, President of the HSA Alberta, said to those attending the AGM was true. That morning, Albertans did not wake up to a radically transformed health system. People who were sick and requiring treatment did not notice a marked change that day. The system didn't change the day that private cataract clinics opened in Alberta either.

But speak to cataract patients now and they will give you a different story. They wait longer for surgery in the public system (which the private clinics were supposed to alleviate) and pay more for the privilege of queue jumping into the private sector (which proponents of the clinics said would not happen). Bill 11 represents another step in the systematic process that the Alberta government has been committed to for the past decade. How it extends to other provinces remains to be seen as the controversial implications flowing from the Free Trade Agreements are untested, but many agree it poses significant risk.

While Ottawa has appointed "watchdogs" to monitor the effects of Bill 11 to ensure its compliance with the Canada Health Act, it is unknown how effective the federal process will be when problems are identified.

The Bill 11 debate certainly galvanized a whole segment of the Alberta population. Individuals who have never walked with a placard, written to their MLA, or marched in protest, did exactly that leading up to the proclamation of Bill 11. It remains to be seen how the final chapter of the politics of Bill 11 plays out at the next provincial election, expected in the spring of 2001.

Ill close with a quote from Dr. Walley Temple, Chief of Surgical Oncology at the Tom Baker Cancer Centre in Calgary, from his address to the Friends of Medicare Rally in Edmonton on April 16, 2000. "Some aspects of our humanity are not for commerce. Not blood, not organs, not children and not medicine."

For more information about Bill 11 and what you can do to help save medicare, visit savemedicare.org

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