

BULLETIN

## Hold government accountable

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by REID JOHNSON



**he actions of the Liberal** government in the spring sitting of the legislature should serve as a reminder to all of us why it is important to pay attention to what happens in Victoria.

Two pieces of legislation were pushed through that restrict the ability to comment on election issues at the municipal and provincial levels. At the 11th hour, the government amended Bill 42, the provincial election gag law from five months to three months, under widespread pressure from the media and other interested parties. The legislation still severely restricts British Columbians ability to criticize government action.

Bill 7 addresses election spending related to municipal elections. It has even more offensive objectives ... including restricting the ability of organizations like unions to communicate with their members through publications like *The Report* about election issues important to them. It was also shoved through the legislature with little comment by the government.

And a third piece of legislation, Bill 21, the so-called *Medicare Protection Amendment Act*, went through without public consultation and with limited debate in the legislature. This legislation received a lot of attention from those concerned about the future of publicly delivered and funded health care in BC, and little attention from the government enacting it.

Bill 21 adds -sustainability" as the sixth principle of Medicare. It allows government to make decisions based on cost instead of need, and justifies cuts to public health care services. It could also allow doctors to charge patients premiums for medically necessary services ... currently not allowed in our Medicare system.

The legislation also introduces a -value" statement that puts the onus on "individual choice, and "personal responsibility. What this really means is that government wants to move us toward more user fees and the growth of private insurance for those who can afford it.

And, thirdly, Bill 21 calls for an -integrated" health care system, opening the provinces doors to wide-spread private, profit-driven investors.

Were told that all this is necessary to keep the system -sustainable."

But as Dr. Randall White, the BC Chair of Canadian Doctors for Medicare, told HSA members at our recent convention, there is a different vision of a sustainable system. -One that considers patients and providers needs, not just the minister of finances needs. Increasing the capacity for publicly funded and delivered health care, including innovative surgical programs, better primary care access, collaborative care, and universal

pharmacare could help achieve sustainability. The BC government, however, is enacting a narrow vision and is setting the stage for healthcare profiteering. BC residents should immediately let their MLAs know what they think of that."

Those sentiments echo the views of the Honourable Roy Romanow, who conducted a national review of Medicare.

-Sustainability in the context of health care is about more than just money. It is about ensuring a continuum of health services in a way that is both fiscally responsible and responsive to everchanging needs. It is also about our society and its values, in the sense of the system having the requisite support of a majority of citizens within a democratic society. [-Canadas Medicare ... At the Crossroads," *Canadian Psychology* Feb. 2006.]

Bill 21 ignores what British Columbians told the Conversation on Health. They support an innovative, equitable and successful publicly delivered and funded health care system.

The Liberal government is guilty of ignoring that input, preferring to impose a legislative agenda that encourages the continued growth of private, profitdriven health care ... hand in hand with legislation that thwarts British Columbians ability to speak out against that agenda. 

*Reid Johnson is President of the Health Sciences Association of British Columbia.*

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180 East Columbia  
New Westminster, BC V3L 0G7

Website  
[www.hsabc.org](http://www.hsabc.org)

Telephone 604-517-0994  
1-800-663-2017