

Supreme Court ruling opens door to Americanization of Canada's health care

OTTAWA - Today's Supreme Court ruling is a devastating blow to Canada's most precious public service, says the Council of Canadians.

"This decision means that U.S. Health Management Organizations (HMOs) could bring their private insurance schemes, which are linked to services in their own private hospitals, to Canada. The result, ultimately, would be the Americanization of Canada's health care system," says Maude Barlow, National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians.

"The Court used examples from Germany, the United Kingdom and Sweden to conclude that private insurance can coexist with a public system. However, these examples do not apply to Canada, as we are subject to NAFTA," says Guy Caron, Canada-U.S. Relations Campaigner for the Council of Canadians.

Caron explains that under Chapter 11 of NAFTA, Canada cannot give preference to Canadian companies over U.S. ones, even for the provision of health care services. Therefore, U.S. for-profit health care companies can get the same funding for their services from the federal government as is allocated to the Canadian public system.

"Through the Romanow Commission, Canadians told the federal government that we want a fully-funded, properly resourced and staffed, public health care system.

By underfunding health care for so long, both the Canadian and the Quebec governments have forced this issue into the courts and both must be blamed for their negligence," says Barlow.

"This ruling reaffirms that adequate and timely health care is a fundamental right of all Canadians. The federal and provincial governments have an obligation to provide these services within the public system, not have this right undermined by for-profit business. Turning to private companies to fix the problems caused by chronic underfunding is completely unacceptable."

Barlow demands that Parliament and the provincial legislatures intervene to protect public health care.

"Our system is based on need and not on ability to pay. It is completely unacceptable to Canadians to have a system that allows those with more money to jump to the front of the line," says Barlow.

"Canadians have consistently opposed a two-tier system. The Supreme Court has reaffirmed that governments must deliver health care in a timely and reasonable manner. Both levels of government have to start putting their money where their mouths are. We demand full implementation of the Romanow Report and a massive reinvestment in public health care to prevent the rise of the private system," says Barlow.