

CBC Television's *The National*

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PETER MANSBRIDGE (HOST):

There are times when politicians seem to speak a language all their own, complete with code words. Take health care, for example. In tonight's Reality Check, Leslie MacKinnon breaks out her decoder. She's taken a closer look at what the politicians are saying on health.

LESLIE MACKINNON (REPORTER):

When it comes to the subject of the privatization of health care, it seems impossible to have a discussion in plain language.

GARY MAR (ALBERTA HEALTH MINISTER):

We're not moving forward on any privatization.

LESLIE MACKINNON (REPORTER):

Straightforward enough... from Alberta's minister of Health today. But he also said this.

GARY MAR (ALBERTA HEALTH MINISTER):

We have tried to work with Prime Minister Martin in the past to talk about flexibility within the Canada Health Act. We will continue to ask for that kind of flexibility.

MICHAEL MCBAIN (CANADIAN HEALTH COALITION):

Politicians are using code words which means something else.

LESLIE MACKINNON (REPORTER):

Michael McBain is with the Canadian Health Coalition, an advocacy group for public health care.

MICHAEL MCBAIN (CANADIAN HEALTH COALITION):

If they're saying they want more flexibility, that's a code word to be able to operate outside the parameters of the Canada Health Act.

LESLIE MACKINNON (REPORTER):

Here is Stephen Harper talking about the national health accord.

STEPHEN HARPER (CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADER):

We would like to see that implemented, that allows a little bit of experiment and delivery options.

MICHAEL MCBAIN (CANADIAN HEALTH COALITION):

Experiment is another code word. It is very deceptive. It gives you the impression they can try something around privatization, bringing in health corporations to deliver a service - and if it doesn't work, well it is just an experiment.

STEPHEN HARPER (CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADER):

The biggest single structural change we've had in the last few years has been this development of alternative delivery mechanisms.

MICHAEL MCBAIN (CANADIAN HEALTH COALITION):

Alternative service delivery, that is an euphemism for corporate health care.

LESLIE MACKINNON (REPORTER):

But listen to this. This is the Liberal minister of Health speaking. PIERRE PETTIGREW (MINISTER OF HEALTH OF CANADA):

We know the public administration principle of the Canada Health Act already provides flexibility on private delivery. Unfortunately, I now realize...

LESLIE MACKINNON (REPORTER):

Days later, Pettigrew retracted the statement.

MICHAEL MCBAIN (CANADIAN HEALTH COALITION):

The Paul Martin government has announced a parliamentary secretary for 'public-private partnerships'. And the philosophy there is to shift as much public service into the hands of private investors and private delivery as possible so they're certainly open to this kind of so-called "experimentation" as well.

LESLIE MACKINNON (REPORTER):

It is said that when politicians meet behind closed doors, they do use the word "privatization." A few days ago, Paul Martin said that if he is prime minister, he will ensure that the first ministers' conference on health this summer will be public and televised. So, if more private health care is on the table, chances are someone will say so, in just those words. Leslie MacKinnon, CBC News, Toronto.