

The Hill Times (October 28, 2002)

Letter-to-the-Editor

By Michael McBane

## Senator Kirby's Conflict

Liberal Senator Michael Kirby's latest report, issued last week, recommends Ottawa send more money to provinces to pay for homecare services. Senator Kirby, the chairperson of the Senate Committee studying health care, is a senior member of the board of directors of Extendicare Inc., a for-profit health corporation which owns a major home care division called ParaMed.

Ethical standards are not being applied to office holders in the Senate of Canada. Nevertheless, it is unethical for individuals who would personally benefit from the commercialization of healthcare delivery to use their public position to advance their business interests.

There's more to Kirby's process than conflict of interest. The Kirby committee, with the notable exception of Senator Doug Roche, promote values that are in conflict with those of the majority of Canadians as reflected in the work of the Romanow Commission. Senator Kirby and the medical doctors on his committee, Senators Morin and Keon, view health care as a commodity for sale like any other commercial product. The Kirby Committee process reflects a U.S.-based libertarian perspective.

An earlier report from their Committee asks: "Is it fair to deny people who can afford to buy health services the right to buy those services?" Commissioner Romanow, on the other hand, reflects Canadian communitarian values that view health care as a public good and not a private commodity. Fairness in this perspective asks: Is it fair to give preferential access to care to those who can afford to pay privately?

Canadians should look beyond the policy differences to recognize the conflicting values implicit in the Kirby and Romanow processes. Conflict of interest and ethics matters. Most Canadians know it is unwise to entrust the sick and the frail elderly to profit-seeking firms.

Commissioner Romanow does not stand to personally benefit from any of his recommendations.

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