

Carillon

EDITORIAL



The Carillon published every Thursday by Derksen Printers, 377 Main Street, Steinbach, Manitoba R5G 1A5. Honourary Publisher Rick Derksen, Publisher Laurie Finley, Editor G. Vandermeulen. Authorized as Second Class Matter and for the payment of postage in cash by Canada Post Corporation, Ottawa

Feds right to punish provinces for private health care billing

The federal government has slapped the fingers of provinces who have allowed health-care providers to charge patients directly.

This is hardly news to many who witnessed the Liberals pledge in 2018 to punish provinces that allow people to pay directly for diagnostic services.

This mandate came with teeth last week as Manitoba was fined \$353,827. No details were released as to the services offered for funds.

Federal Health Minister Jean-Yves Duclos made their position abundantly clear.

“There should be no fees for medically necessary health-care services, wherever people may live in this country.”

He’s right of course. Two tier health-care systems are not beneficial to Canadians.

If the rich can cut the line for service that doesn’t mean the line is suddenly shorter. Instead it means more doctors will transition away from serving the general public in favour of catering to those who pay directly.

The net result would be fewer medical staff and longer lines.

Because virtual care has become more common since COVID, many provinces have been hesitant to keep covering the cost. Patients however have often been willing to pay for that service.

Even in Steinbach, the decision of whether to go to emergency since doctor’s appointments are difficult to get or be able to pay a fee for an online consult would be one people of many income levels would consider.

The federal government’s claw back of transfers isn’t a punitive measure. Instead it effectively passes back the cost they should have paid in the first place. In 2020/21 for example, fees for diagnostic tests were being charged in seven provinces, totalling \$76 million. That’s the dollar amount being taken back from transfers.

Provinces can also recoup those funds if they take time to end that practice.

Manitoba isn’t nearly the worst perpetrator for this.

Quebec lost \$41.9 million, followed by B.C. at \$17 million and Alberta at \$13.8 million.

Others lost funds for allowing patients to be charged for abortion services or surgery in private clinics.

Not everyone is on board with this approach.

Winnipeg Free Press columnist Tom Brodbeck brought a healthy dose of sarcasm to the issue.

“... no one should be allowed to pay out-of-pocket for any medically necessary service, said Duclos, even if that means languishing for months or years in pain and discomfort on a government wait list,” Brodbeck writes in a Wednesday column. “If Canadians have to suffer, they all have to suffer together – another point of national pride, evidently.”

He points out that under the Canada Health Act, doctors can opt out of provincial health-care plans and charge patients directly.

Physicians are not allowed to bill patients for insured services under the provincial health-care plans, but they are able to bill those not covered.

That means any patient can simply travel to another province and it’s a perfectly legal practice to charge for services.

Brodbeck also pictures a scenario where wait times continue to grow, and health care continues to be mismanaged.

But that doesn’t have to be the reality.

We don’t have to choose between a flawed health-care system with massive waiting lists, and private for-profit health care.

That simplistic thinking is what keeps patients in the U.S. dying of treatable illnesses while living in the richest country in the world, albeit one that has long lacked a moral compass.

We do indeed have massive problems in health care and those must be addressed.

We need to build and maintain a system that has enough safeguards in place that it can cope in usual and unusual times.

It’s difficult to say what the solution is.

But it’s clear that creating a two tiered system is not part of the solution.

Those who have the financial ability to pay for their own treatment and surgeries would do better to lend a voice and a hand in advocating for a stronger health system for all of us, not just one that allows them privileged access.

-GV



PHOTO BY ALMA BARKMAN

Iceicles are inverse thermometers registering mood, their mercury dripping as spring fever soars.

Businesses need to make a profit

NDP leader Jagmeet Singh probably thought he scored a home run when he got to grill Loblaw CEO Galen Weston during a parliamentary committee hearing last week.

Pointing to Loblaw’s record high profits, Singh dramatically asked, “How much profit is too much?” Too bad Singh wasn’t paying more attention to the answers he received. He might have learned something about how private enterprise actually works.

Weston patiently explained that grocery chains have a very small profit margin on basic food items. In fact, Loblaw makes approximately one dollar of profit for every \$25 of food that it sells. Thus, if Loblaw eliminated all its profit, customers would still pay \$24 for those same food items.

So, while it is true that Loblaw made record high profits last year (more than \$2 billion), most of that came from non-food items such as beauty products and pharmaceutical drugs. In other words, grocery chains make far more money selling lipstick than selling chicken.

It’s also important to remember that companies such as Loblaw have big numbers because they sell billions of dollars worth of product each year. A thin profit margin still produces a huge number when you multiply it by \$56.5 billion.

Of course, the hidden assumption behind Singh’s question is that it is immoral for businesses to make a profit on essential items such as food. Presumably Singh expects businesses to act more like charities and simply give the food away.

Even better, perhaps the government should set up a crown corporation to take charge of grocery sales. That way we could be certain that no profit would be made. It sounds like a socialist paradise.

However, the problem with this paradise is that it doesn’t exist. The reason we have such easy access to food is because the private sector makes it available to us. We should be grateful for the many business owners who take huge risks establishing their businesses. Instead of complaining when they make “too much” money, we should celebrate their success.

Obviously, not all business owners act ethically. Some engage in illegal behaviour, while others treat their workers poorly. Back



Think Again

Michael Zwaagstra

in 2015, Loblaw itself even admitted to participating in a bread price-fixing scheme for nearly fifteen years. The Competition Bureau is still investigating.

Canadians are right to be concerned about the rising cost of food. Inflation is a serious problem, particularly when you are on a fixed income. To find out the real cause of inflation, we need look no further than the Liberal government’s out-of-control spending. This is the same Liberal government that Singh has promised to prop up until 2025.

Left-wing politicians like to point the finger at “big business.” But let’s not forget that every big business started out as a small business. There is nothing wrong with a business getting bigger. In fact, growth is usually a sign of success.

However, no matter how large a business becomes, there is one thing that never changes—it needs profit to survive. If we go down the road of demonizing businesses for making a profit, we are not going to like where it leads us. Millions of Canadians have jobs today because they work for a profitable big business. I don’t want those jobs to disappear.

When dealing with economic problems such as inflation, let’s look past the simplistic slogans and get to the heart of the matter. Instead of asking how much profit is too much, we should ask how we can create an environment where more businesses succeed.

Businesses need to make a profit. There is nothing wrong with acknowledging this fact.

Michael Zwaagstra is a high school teacher and a Steinbach city councillor. He can be reached at mzwaagstra@shaw.ca.

We would like to hear from you...

Your opinions and viewpoints are important to us and the community. We would like to hear what you have to say.

Letters can be sent to The Carillon’s Editor
Greg Vandermeulen at
Greg.Vandermeulen@thecarillon.com

NEWSMEDIA COUNCIL

The Carillon is a member of the National Newsmedia Council, which is an independent organization established to determine acceptable journalistic practises and ethical behaviour. If you have concerns about editorial content, please contact Greg Vandermeulen, Editor - The Carillon, Greg.Vandermeulen@thecarillon.com. If you are not satisfied with the response and wish to file a formal complaint, visit the web site at www.mediacouncil.ca and fill out the form or call toll-free 1-844-877-1163 for additional information.

The Carillon

News that matters to people in southeastern Manitoba

Publishers

Derksen Printers, a division of
FP Canadian Newspapers Limited Partnership

Publisher: Laurie Finley

Editor: Greg Vandermeulen

News Staff: Cassidy Dankochik, Jordan Ross, Nicole Buffie

Advertising: Janet Kehler, Desiree Barkman, Julie Driedger

Circulation Supervisor: Amanda Monkman

377 Main St., Steinbach, MB R5G 1A5

Phone 204-326-3421 Fax 204-326-4860

Manitoba Toll Free: 1-800-442-0463

website: www.thecarillon.com

email: info@thecarillon.com

Single copy: \$2.00 (including taxes)

Subscription rates: One Year

Manitoba \$50.21 plus taxes - \$56.23

Out of Province \$65.68 plus taxes - \$68.96

Outside Canada: \$209.10

Digital E-Edition

Within Canada \$41.33 plus taxes - \$43.40

Outside Canada \$41.33

email: subscriptions@thecarillon.com

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESS TO:

THE CARILLON

377 MAIN STREET

STEINBACH, MB R5G 1A5

We acknowledge the (financial) support of the Government of Canada

Funded by the Government of Canada

Canada

This newspaper printed with vegetable based ink

All contents protected by copyright.

Recycle this newspaper