

THE FREE PRESS OPINION

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"The theory of a free press is that the truth will emerge from free reporting and free discussion." Walter Lippman

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Time for real talk about health care

Health care is emerging as the dominant issue in the federal election. What is not emerging is an honest debate on the matter, as all the parties jockey to be the custodians of Canada's sacred shrine of medicare. While Canadians are waiting for specifics over rhetoric, they are getting more and more apathetic. The patience of voters, it seems, is wearing thin with the constant squabbling.

The reality is Canada has two-tier health care, even though no one likes to admit it.

Canadians get free prescriptions in the hospital but must pay for them as soon as they pass out the front door, putting, in particular, senior citizens in the position of choosing drugs over food. Eye care is not totally covered, forcing many to accept a fuzzy world or hope for a good plan at work. Residents in some provinces can get MRI scans done privately, speeding up the repair process, but the prime minister now vows to end that practice.

And, as we all know, anyone with the money can slip down to the United States for the care if they want.

Which does not even take into account the queue jumping that happens with those going through the labyrinth of WCB assistance.

As the election drags on, politicians are fixated on 'one-tier' versus 'two-tier.' The attacks suggest this party will bring in American-style health care or that this party has allowed Canada's care to slip, with each leader vowing to be the one to restore the system to good shape.

The reality is fewer Canadians are paying to prop up a health care system that is under more and more demand, a situation that is only going to get worse as the Baby Boomers head off into their golden years.

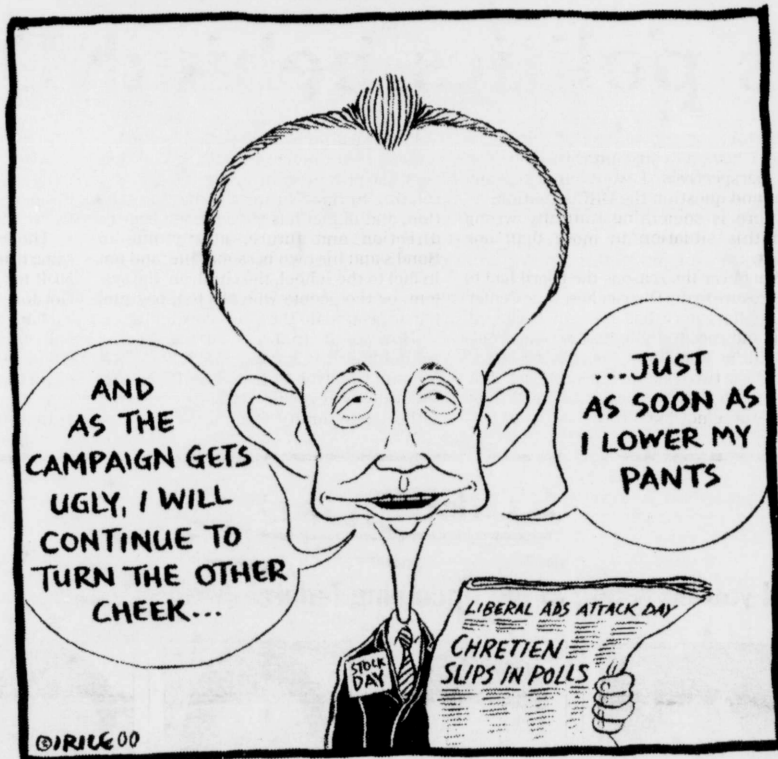
To suggest money is the only solution is wrong. We have a shortage of doctors, nurses and taxpayers.

Alliance MP Keith Martin offers the concept of a parallel system, where doctors do some work in private clinics — which he argues would reduce waiting lists in public facilities. As well, Mr. Martin says doctors would not be allowed to opt out of public work, eliminating the possibility of the best heading into lucrative private practice.

In Oregon, there is a rating system, where the state will pay for more than 500 medical procedures. After that, the public is on their own.

There are alternatives that will allow us to continue with a health care system that is available to all Canadians regardless of income or status. But it would be nice if our leaders got past the platitudes and offered some real alternatives.

After all, our health depends on it.



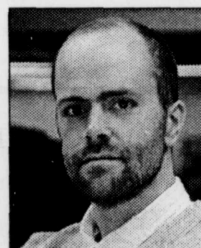
Howling for attention

Parents of young kids, at least, will understand when I confess that, after less than an hour of last week's leader's debate, I had to turn the radio off. The noise coming from the speakers was all too familiar to these ears. You see, my kids are going through a really rough time right now. There's been a lot of crying and whining and yelling and screaming and fighting around our house lately. So the last thing I needed to hear was more of the same from a bunch of grown men and women.

Why is it that modern election campaigns have become a regression into infantilism, a gradual slide into a stage at which men and women feel they must act like preschoolers in order to get our attention?

Because we the voting public demand it, that's why.

We live in the television age, after all, where they turn the volume up on the ads so that we awake from our stupor long enough to pay attention to what's really important — the sales pitch.



MCALPINE VIEW

Cam McAlpine

I can, sad to say, block out most of what my kids are saying if they are telling me for the fourteenth time, for example, about the latest Pokemon episode and the intricacies each of the transformations that each of the Pokemon can make in the course of a half hour show. Even if they are speaking well and passionately.

At these times my kids

know there's only one thing that's going to get my attention. Whining, pouting, screaming, crying and fighting. It's not positive attention they'll get. But it's attention, and at this point they'll take it any way they can get it.

Similarly, I can block out most of what politicians say when they start getting into party platforms and the intricacies of how that two per cent tax cut is really going to make a whopping big deal in my life. I'm sure it's the same for most of you.

So it's not really a surprise that the politicians arrive at the same conclusion as my kids: if all else fails, whine, pout, scream, cry and fight. It's not positive attention they'll get. But it's attention.

The obvious solution on the home front, I suppose, is that I should try to meet my kids' needs before it gets to that stage.

As for the politicians, maybe it's time all of us started paying a little more attention before they begin the howling skid into the infantile behaviour that is negative campaigning.

Either that or start instituting parliamentary spankings and timeouts.

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