



For Immediate Release
August 22, 2006

Conservatives Must Show Leadership on Health Care Wait Times

VANCOUVER - Making progress on shorter health care wait times in Canada requires a meaningful partnership between the federal and provincial governments and the funding to back it up, Liberal Health Critic Ruby Dhalla said today.

"If this government is truly committed to reducing wait times, they must work hand in hand with the provinces – not just sit back and offload responsibility," Ms. Dhalla said after meeting with her colleagues to discuss Liberal health care policy at the Party's caucus retreat in Vancouver.

"It's not enough to simply tell Canadians that health care is a top-five priority. The Conservatives have shown no leadership and taken no action to achieve results on this important issue. The provinces need to have the resources and tools they need to manage wait times and give Canadians the level of service and care that they deserve. The time for rhetoric has passed – the government must take concrete actions immediately."

In a speech to the Canadian Medical Association yesterday, Health Minister Tony Clement warned that Canada will soon face a litigation-driven health care system if provincial governments do not act soon to reduce wait times. Yet despite the fact that Mr. Clement claimed a wait times guarantee is still a priority for his government, the Conservatives have not only failed to provide the provinces with any new resources or funding, but have also refused to offer a national vision.

"It's no wonder we are facing a crisis with health care wait times in Canada," Ms. Dhalla said. "The Conservatives are demanding more services from our already overtaxed provincial health care systems, but are unwilling to provide any money to pay for them. They have not contributed any new ideas to the debate."

By contrast, the previous Liberal government invested \$41.2 billion and worked with the provinces to create a 10-year action plan to strengthen the health care system. As part of the Liberal Health Accord signed with the provinces in 2004,

the government devoted \$5.5 billion to help support meaningful reductions in wait times in priority areas such as cancer, heart, diagnostic imaging, joint replacements and sight restoration.

“Canadians expect their governments to work together to improve access to health care services, to be accountable for the use of taxpayers’ money, and to ensure that the system is sustainable for future generations,” Ms. Dhalla said. “Prime Minister Harper can no longer avoid addressing this critical issue.”

. -30-

For more information please contact:
Office of Dr. Ruby Dhalla, M.P.
Brampton-Springdale
Tel: 905 874 6868
Email: dhallr@parl.gc.ca