

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 4, 2004

British Columbians double-crossed over MSP contract with American corporation

BCGEU vows to continue legal action to stop the government from handing over personal medical information to American-linked companies

"British Columbians have been double-crossed," said George Heyman, president of the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU). "The health services minister promised that a contract negotiated with Maximus corporation would ensure the privacy of British Columbians would not be compromised.

"Less than a week after the privacy commissioner confirmed in his report that the USA Patriot Act is a real threat to the privacy of British Columbians, the Campbell Liberals are rushing in to sign, seal and deliver a deal!

"Minister Hansen said back in April that his government would be seeking advice from the privacy commissioner. Well, last week Commissioner Loukidelis provided his advice by way of 16 extensive recommendations. Either that wasn't the advice the minister was looking for or he never wanted it in the first place.

"Either way, British Columbians need to know that their government is cutting a deal that could potentially put their personal medical records in the hands of the FBI and other U.S. federal authorities."

Heyman further criticized the government for signing a deal with Maximus Inc. despite media reports of problems involving that company's handling of IT contracts in Wisconsin, Arizona and Connecticut. It reportedly cost over \$1 million more to run an Arizona welfare-to-work pilot program than if it had been publicly administered by the state.

Heyman vowed to fight the Maximus deal through the courts. The BCGEU initiated a court challenge over MSP back in February on the grounds that selling the administration of Medicare is a violation of the B.C. Medicare Protection Act, the Canada Health Act, and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

"If the Campbell Liberals think they are above Canadian privacy laws and the Canada Health Act, they aren't. We'll see them in court."

The BCGEU responded last week to the privacy commissioner's report by calling on the government to hold off on its plans to contract with American-linked companies to administer MSP and other government services, including Pharmacare, government payroll, Provincial Revenue, disaster recovery, and workstation support services.

Heyman said today's announcement shows the government has been continuing its negotiations with Maximus during the whole public inquiry process. "There's no way the Campbell Liberals could have complied with the rigorous measures recommended by the privacy commissioner prior to signing this contract. They don't even know if their so-called 'privacy protection measures' will be effective. The privacy commissioner said he will comment shortly on these measures but the government doesn't even have the decency to wait. And where are the assurances from the U.S. authorities that they will not seek access to British Columbians' personal information?," Heyman said.

Personal information at risk through the outsourcing of the administration of MSP includes access to an individual's medical reports, psychological and mental health reports, x-rays, photographs, details of surgeries, doctors' names, criminal record, financial information including income, dependents and bankruptcy, immigration and refugee status, and disabilities.

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