

Good Morning and thank you for coming....

My name is Norrah Whitney....it is my pleasure to join Brenda, Senator Munson and Eugene this morning to speak to you about this very important issue....

I live in Toronto...and have been an autism treatment advocate for almost 10 years....

I am the founding director of FEAT of Ontario which is a not-for-profit volunteer organization of parents and professionals who seek universal access to Medicare coverage for proven effective, science-based treatment for all Canadians diagnosed with autism. I work very closely with our FEAT of BC colleagues who were recently on a cross-country tour which included stops in Ottawa where they met with local parent activists, then in Toronto where we had a very useful strategy session...

But....most importantly...I am a single mother who has been fighting on behalf of my autistic son and thousands of other Canadian children....fighting... or...more precisely at war with our OWN government....for what we Canadians believe is a basic human right...healthcare....access to treatment....

You may think we are all equal and worthy of the same privileges that Canadian citizenship provides....that we all have equal access to health care....after all...that's what our Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees...doesn't it?...Or, that Medicare covers all our core health needs...after all...isn't that what the Canada Health Act guarantees?...Well, no.....not if you're autistic...Our government has deemed our children not worthy of treatment....

How are my rights so much more important than my son's?...I have had two battles with cancer this year....on my second battle, it took only 21 days from a potentially fatal cancer diagnosis...to my trip to the operating room....No hoops to jump through, no court injunction to obtain against the government to make them pay, no credit card was necessary to save my life.....I simply pulled my grandfather's legacy from my wallet....my OHIP card....and now I'm cancer-free. My grandfather was

Sir John Leo Whitney....he was appointed by former Ontario Premier Robarts to develop the blueprint for our very own OHIP system....

He along with leaders like Tommy Douglas, Lester Pearson, Robert Stanfield, John Diefenbaker and Pierre Trudeau, each of them principled leaders who demonstrated character and courage...each in their own ways championed social justice issues before they became slogans...each would without exception be appalled by our current government's political indifference and discrimination against our children.

Principled leadership and courage....fine virtues which we Canadians expect from those in public service....Well....while in opposition, our own Health Minister Tony Clement said it best, "Not only do Canadians demand a government with higher standards and more accountability, I know they deserve one. I want a government that is accountable to Parliament and the people. Doing what's morally right....Canada deserves political leaders with courage to do what they believe is morally right...." Well... Mr. Clement....parents of autistic children across Canada are still waiting for you to do the morally right thing.

In April of this year, Minister Clement singled out autism spectrum disorder in a speech given at the "Child Health Summit" where he stated, " I know we can agree that the health of Canadian children is of utmost importance to all of us, and I assure you that the well-being of our children remains at the forefront of our government's priorities...." Well....I don't think so...A web-site, a "national awareness strategy" and a stake-holder symposium (which has been cancelled and not re-scheduled) are not the solutions....as a matter of fact they are just more useless bloviating and predictable public relations exercises designed to "sound good, but do nothing....They also serve to add more fuel to voter cynicism and apathy... which is growing exponentially in our country...

“Medicare for Autism Now!” is the solution....and parent activists and supporters... all of whom are voters across this country expect this to happen! We expect this government to act By immediately amending the *Canada Health Act* to include autism treatment under Medicare. We are focused and are organizing to ensure that MPs who commit to doing so are elected in the next federal election... regardless of their party affiliation....

This is not a left or right issue....it is a right or wrong issue...

Ensuring every Canadian’s health care is covered regardless of where they live or their ability to pay is one of Canada’s defining features....Medicare for Autism is Canada....

This injustice is no longer acceptable.....Martin Luther King said, “Justice delayed is justice denied...” our children have already waited too long....many of them and their families have paid an extremely high price in doing so.....

The cost in human suffering is immeasurable....this is a shame on our nation.....

The only thing in the way of the solution is political will....

Let me be clear....the parents of autistic children are no longer prepared to appear before our government as supplicants...those days are over....our question is: Will our MPs summon the necessary courage and political will to overcome their political impotence by over-ruling the entrenched health care technocrats and do the morally right thing by our children? If not, we have a problem.....the solution will be to elect some new MPs...from coast to coast....ones who are made of different stuff.

Thank you very much for listening.....we will be happy to take questions later.....