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Opposition stands united in call for independent public inquiry of health care crisis

Edmonton – Joined by Wildrose Alliance Leader Danielle Smith, NDP Leader Brian Mason, Alberta Party Leader Sue Huff and Independent MLA Dr. Raj Sherman, Alberta Liberal Leader David Swann issued an all-party demand for the Premier to call an independent public inquiry into the health care crisis.

Swann and the other opposition parties have been demanding the Tories allow the Health Quality Council of Alberta (HQCA) to conduct an inquiry into 322 cases of compromised care at University of Alberta emergency rooms. Yesterday afternoon, the government finally relented.

But later that day, Albertans learned that the Tories allegedly forced a surgeon out of his job as head of thoracic surgery at Capital Health for complaining publicly about surgery wait times and inadequate resources for his patients.

The severity of this new allegation makes it clear that an HQCA investigation is no longer enough. Representatives of all opposition parties held emergency meetings last night and this morning, quickly coming to the conclusion that only a fully independent public inquiry could uncover the truth.

“Today we speak with one powerful voice, on behalf of all Albertans who care about public health care and financial accountability,” Swann said in a prepared statement at a joint news conference held by the opposition parties. “We now demand, on behalf of the people of Alberta, a fully independent public inquiry, one completely free of government interference, control or intimidation.”

Ideally, the inquiry proposed by the opposition parties would have these features:

- Investigate whether or not health care staff and professionals were subject to intimidation, including retribution, professional or employment discipline or the threat thereof, or attacks on their character or professional reputations, in order to prevent them from speaking about issues which affect patient care or the effective delivery of health care in Alberta
- An inquiry open to the media and the public, transparent and overseen by a current or former Justice of the Crown, with total discretion as to who is called to testify and full access to any documents deemed relevant by the Justice
- A full and open public inquiry to investigate whether the Alberta government, Alberta Health Services or former regional health authorities paid any form of compensation to any person in return for their silence on the quality of health care, or lack thereof, for Alberta patients
- All witnesses relieved of any obligations pursuant to confidential and non-disclosure provisions for the purpose of giving evidence

“We will not allow this government to escape the consequences of its mismanagement and possible corruption,” Swann continued in his statement. “We will not allow our doctors and nurses to be threatened for telling the truth. We will not allow public health care to be destroyed by incompetence and possible corruption.”

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Attached: Terms of Reference

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