

**Media Conference -- Tuesday March 31, 2009 – 10:00 a.m.**

**New report reveals undemocratic trade plan for Canada, and exposes threats to public services**

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Good morning, my name is Doris Grinspun. I am a registered nurse and the executive director of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.

For decades, RNAO has spoken out on health care and the social and environmental factors that impact on health. I am here today to caution Ontarians that the trade agreement that Ontario is currently negotiating with Quebec can endanger the public's health.

Governments across this country have been conducting trade negotiations behind closed doors... without meaningful dialogue or input from the public. This is an era where transparency is being called upon. However, here in Ontario this is not acted upon in the Ontario Quebec Partnership Agreement that is being negotiated in the corridors of power and away from public scrutiny. Nurses are asking Premier McGuinty today: why is it that business lobbies are insiders to the OQEPA negotiation but the people of Ontario are excluded? You promised a transparent and democratic government; Premier, please act on your promise!

Let's face it. "Trade agreements" is a misnomer. These are, in reality, deregulation agreements. They are meant to tie the hands of governments so they can disregard the democratic aspirations of their people. We depend on government to provide everything that assures us of our health and our wellbeing: social services, education, health care, clean air, a safe environment. Surely, if nothing else, we have learned from the collapse of the financial sector in the United States the potential consequences of ideology-driven deregulation motivated by greed, not by the public interest.

TILMA and other agreements like it shift power to investors who can, under these agreements, sue the government when they think their profits are affected. Already, under the NAFTA, Dow Chemical is suing Canada because the Quebec government decided to protect its children with a pesticide ban. And Arizona investors are threatening a NAFTA challenge because they face barriers to establish private-for-profit clinics in British Columbia. There are dozens of similar lawsuits under the NAFTA across the US-Canada border. We don't need similar lawsuits across provincial borders.

Nurses have a strong message for Premier McGuinty: We do not want Ontario to go down this dangerous road.

Premier McGuinty is negotiating a trade agreement with Quebec that has the potential to be another TILMA as negotiated by B.C. and Alberta. He has also endorsed transforming the Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT), a pan-Canadian agreement, in a way that will start to resemble TILMA. These agreements contain provisions on labour mobility that can undermine the capacity to regulate professions such as nursing, compromising therefore public safety.

Many of you may already be aware of the Quebec government's record when it comes to privatizing health care in that province. We don't need a trade agreement with Quebec that will empower for-profit entities in Quebec to make inroads into Ontario's public health care system.

Premier McGuinty: you have done good things for Ontarians. The government has introduced measures to address poverty and improve the social safety net. Just yesterday we were celebrating with Minister John Gerretsen the strongest pesticide ban in North America. Don't erode the gains of your own government by catering to those who may be looking for the opportunity to sue our government for our pesticide ban. Premier: follow the path of democracy, Medicare, social programs, protection of our food and our environment

Thank you.