

Clegg and Williams Write to Lib Dem Peers - for NALM

Monday, February 27, 2012 7:26 PM

Nick Clegg and **Shirley Williams** have written a joint letter to Lib Dem MPs and peers today about the health bill spelling out the final changes that they want to make to the bill. In the letter, they stress that the bill has already changed a great deal since last year and argue that, once these final amendments are accepted, the Lib Dems should be happy to support the legislation.

Here's the key extract.

"Given how precious the NHS is, we want to rule out beyond doubt any threat of a US-style market in the NHS. That is why we want to see changes made to this Bill that have been put forward by our Liberal Democrat team in the House of Lords to make sure that the NHS can never be treated like the gas, electricity, or water industry.

First, we propose removing the reviews by the Competition Commission from the Bill to make sure that the NHS is never treated like a private industry.

Second, we want to keep the independent regulator of Foundation Trusts, Monitor, to make sure hospitals always serve NHS patients first and foremost.

Third, we will introduce measures to protect the NHS from any threat of takeover from US -style healthcare providers by insulating the NHS from the full force of competition law. We will also insist that anyone involved with a commissioning group is required to declare their own financial interests, so that the integrity of clinical commissioning groups is maintained.

Finally, we will put in place additional safeguards to the private income cap to make sure that Foundation Trusts cannot focus on private profits before patients. These changes are needed, not just because of this Bill, but also to plug the holes left by Labour's 2006 Health Act that allowed private providers to make profits at the NHS' and taxpayers' expense. It was that Act that started the process of the marketisation of the NHS by allowing private providers to be paid on average 11% more than the NHS. These changes will ensure that competition and diversity in the NHS will always be done in the interests of patients and not profits.

Next month we will return to where this process all began a year ago when we meet at our party's Spring conference. Once these final changes have been agreed, we believe conference can be reassured that it has finished the job it started last March and the bill should be allowed to proceed. We believe these changes will appeal to those in the House of Lords and the House of Commons who share our commitment to the NHS, and believe it can now embark on the reforms that matter: putting patients at the centre, working with local communities, and responding to the financial challenges of an ageing population."

Downing Street and the health minister Simon Burns have already signalled that they are willing to accept minor changes to the bill (see [11.40am](#) and [12.50pm](#)), but it is not clear yet whether that means the amendments mentioned in the Clegg/Williams letter will be accepted in their entirety.