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Health-care advocates fear report overlooked On Hill to warn MPs Romanow findings at risk Health coalition says Liberals will ignore consensus

By TIM HARPER, OTTAWA BUREAU CHIEF

OTTAWA—A major health-care lobby will blitz Parliament Hill today, warning MPs that Roy Romanow's recommendations on the future of medicare are going to be "tossed overboard" by the federal government — less than two weeks after he brought in the blueprint.

The Canadian Health Coalition, which has brought in health-care experts from across the country to meet 75 MPs, says it is being snubbed by Health Minister Anne McLellan because she is more interested in political expediency than following the consensus forged by Romanow.

A spokesperson for McLellan said she will attend a national conference set for Gatineau, Que., beginning tomorrow, where she hopes to hear from all sides of the health-care debate, including the health coalition.

The Health Coalition believes various provincial studies, including an Alberta study by former deputy prime minister Don Mazankowski and a federal report from a Senate committee headed by Liberal Michael Kirby, risk crowding out some of Romanow's key findings.

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), in a call for an open, nationally televised first ministers summit, agreed,

"Canadians don't want Mazankowski, they don't want Kirby and they don't want Romanow lite," said CLC president Ken Georgetti.

McLellan's spokesperson, Farah Mohamed, said nothing should be read into the fact McLellan will not meet the pro-medicare lobby today.

"The minister will be attending the public policy forum and all stakeholders will be there and the Canadian Health Coalition will be there," she said. "Not having a meeting with any one group is no indication of anything. It doesn't mean she is ruling anything out."

The forum McLellan will attend — "Moving from Debate to Action" — is organized by David Zussman, a government adviser and president of the Public Policy Forum.

Mike McBane of the Canadian Health Coalition said he believes the forum lacks legitimacy, because the first two speakers are Kirby and a representative of the Mazankowski report, both of which leaned toward a private-public mix on health care.

"It's a corporate forum," McBane said. "It is co-sponsored by the pharmaceutical industry and is put on by the elites of this country who want to toss Romanow overboard, have it killed in the backrooms instead of listening to what Canadians told Romanow.

"Canadians are alarmed that Ottawa is mouthing support for Romanow while quietly working on a plan which (ignores) recommendations on accountability and not-for-profit delivery."

In the House of Commons, NDP MP Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre) also accused Prime Minister Jean Chrétien of "offering platitudes and generalities" and refusing to commit to Romanow's call for federal health-care funding to be restored to the 25 per cent level.

Chrétien repeated that there will be a first ministers summit in late January or early February.

"Time is running out and we are squandering an opportunity," Wasylycia-Leis said. "As we suspected, the government went to the health ministers meeting last Friday with no plan and no strategy. It gave no indication of how it intended to implement the Romanow blueprint."

McLellan said she thought Friday's meeting was a good start, but acknowledged that provincial reports such as the Mazankowski report, which advocated a medical savings account, and the Senate report from Kirby, which called for a dedicated health tax, were discussed at the meeting.