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By BRIAN LAGHI, With a report from Jill Mahoney in Edmonton

KINGSTON -- Roy Romanow took on the critics of his landmark report on medicare yesterday, warning against those who would hijack his commission to further their own interests.

In what he pledged would be his final appearance concerning the document for some time, Mr. Romanow warned that Canadians will not stand for further provincial-federal battles as the two sides begin talks this week on how to change the system.

"As I am no longer a politician seeking elective office, I tell you I feel very comfortable ignoring that old political maxim 'never explain, never complain,' " he said in a speech at Queen's University. "I don't want to see the reform agenda which Canadians have asked me to articulate for them being hijacked, to be very blunt about it, by other interests."

He told the group that he wanted to set the record straight, "in the hope of shedding light on what my report actually says, versus the interpretations given to it by those who want to use it as a wedge or cudgel to advance their own agenda."

Mr. Romanow refrained from naming individuals. However, Alberta Premier Ralph Klein and Quebec's Bernard Landry both severely criticized the document just after its release last week, saying its adoption by Ottawa would constitute an invasion of provincial jurisdiction over health care. Mr. Landry had even suggested calling an election on the issue.

The massive report calls on the federal government to deliver \$15-billion in targeted health-care money over the next three years to fund programs dealing with home care and manageable drug costs, to purchase diagnostic equipment and to enhance rural residents' accessibility to care. Mr. Romanow has also said the provinces should be subject to conditions before being able to draw down the money, a recommendation that has particularly irked Mr. Landry.

"To those who say the money should simply be provided -- just give us the cash, Ottawa, and get out of our lives -- without an accountability framework and without an agreement on objectives, I respectfully and not so mildly disagree," Mr. Romanow said.

He added that those critics who believe he is intent on trampling over provincial authority could not be farther from the truth.

He explained that provinces would have significant flexibility in how they use the money. For example, provinces that already have substantial home-care programs could use the cash to expand their existing efforts in the area or to improve access to them. He noted that the Social Union Framework Agreement agreed to by the provinces and Ottawa allows provinces who do not need the entire federal transfer to reinvest it in related areas.

He also expressed concern with the way some critics have interpreted his plan for a national health council that would report publicly about how money is being spent. Individuals such as Mr. Klein have called it a watchdog agency, a term that Mr. Romanow rejects.

"The notion is contrary to the spirit of my report, which focuses on collaboration, not policing."

Asked later if some individuals were misrepresenting his report, Mr. Romanow said yes.

"I think it's fair comment to say that I think it has been misportrayed in some areas."

He also refused to comment on the criticisms of Senator Michael Kirby, who said Mr. Romanow's report does not adequately address how the system should be financed.

In Edmonton last night for a fundraising dinner, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien said he is sure the federal and provincial governments can work together on health-care changes.

He credited Mr. Klein for his role in achieving consensus on health funding two years ago, calling him "the dean of the premiers," and said Alberta has been a leader on accountability, which is a tenet of Mr. Romanow's report.

"Ralph Klein has always been a positive force in these discussions. He has a style all his own and I guess I do too. But most of the time we work very well together."

Mr. Chrétien also said his government will try to develop a federal-provincial approach to health-care change. If all sides can agree on a plan for significant change, the federal government will devote the necessary funds.

"This is not a matter for partisan politics. It is no place to score political points," he said.

CANADIAN HEALTH COALITION SPECIAL UPDATE

Read the December 3rd Romanow Speech to Queen's University

<<http://www.healthcoalition.ca/romanow-responds.pdf>>

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Toronto Star (December 4, 2002)

Romanow strikes back at his critics

Says reforms will end 'blame' game Provinces defined report's priorities

By VANESSA LU, HEALTH POLICY REPORTER

Provincial posturing should not be allowed to hijack the much-needed health-care reform that Canadians so desperately want, Roy Romanow says.

In his final public speech as royal commissioner, Romanow hit back yesterday at his critics, notably Alberta, Quebec and Ontario.

He argued the recommendations of his report on the future of medicare were not an assault on provincial jurisdiction.

In a speech at Queen's University in Kingston, Romanow objected to people who use his report "as a wedge or cudgel to advance their own agenda."

In his report, released last Thursday in Ottawa, the former New Democrat premier of Saskatchewan argued for a big boost in federal health-care funding as well as accountability from the provinces on how dollars are spent.

His proposals would put an end to the nasty "name, blame, shame" game, Romanow said.

Alberta Premier Ralph Klein called the report "a non-starter" and dismissed any suggestion that Ottawa should have a say in how health-care dollars are dispensed. Ontario Premier Ernie Eves argued Romanow's recommendations do nothing to shorten waiting lists or add nurses at the bedside. Quebec's three political parties unanimously condemned the report in the National Assembly.

"To those who say the money should be provided without an accountability framework and without an agreement on objectives, I respectfully disagree," Romanow said yesterday.

"We tried that route and found it wanting. What happened to the \$23.4 billion we added to the system just two years ago?" asked Romanow, who signed the deal as premier of Saskatchewan.

"Where has it gone? What has been achieved from it? How have wait lists improved, or access been enhanced, or quality gotten better? We don't know because as the auditor-general notes, we have no way of knowing."

He argued that the \$8.5 billion he proposed in targeted areas to kick-start access to diagnostic imaging, prescription drugs, home care, first-line primary care and services in rural and remote communities are areas deemed important by provincial governments.

"These aren't priorities that I just dreamed up," he said. "They are the very ones that the provinces themselves have identified."

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Canadian Press (December 4, 2002)

Health-care reforms wouldn't trample provincial jurisdiction, Romanow says

By DENNIS BUECKERT

OTTAWA (CP) - Roy Romanow shot back Tuesday at critics of his royal commission report on health care, saying his call for accountability in health spending would not trample on provincial jurisdiction.

In the text of a speech at Queen's University in Kingston, Ont., Romanow says some conclusions in his report last week have been deliberately misinterpreted. "Some deliberately mischievous spins have been put on certain of my conclusions and recommendations," he says, in what was expected to be his last major public appearance defending the report.

The report called for \$15 billion in long-term and one-time federal funding by 2006 to expand medicare and stop the growth of private medicine. It also recommended that provinces account for how they spend federal money.

In his speech, Romanow defends his call for Ottawa to direct short-term funding for high-priority areas such as home care and prescription drugs rather than letting provinces spend the money as they please.

Alberta, Quebec, Ontario, the Canadian Alliance and the Bloc Quebecois have slammed Romanow's report, alleging that it calls for federal intrusion on provincial jurisdiction over health care.

But Romanow says the federal government has already tried handing out money without an agreement on objectives, and it didn't work.

"What happened to the \$23.4 billion we added to the system just two years ago? Where has it gone? What has been achieved from it?"

"How have waitlists improved, or access been enhanced or quality gotten better? We don't know because . . . we have no way of knowing."

Romanow says he's worried his reform agenda will be "hijacked by other interests" and objects to claims that he recommended a watchdog agency to monitor health care.

He says the recommended agency, the Health Council of Canada, would focus on federal-provincial collaboration and accountability to the public, not on policing.

"The new council would certainly not be a 'watchdog agency,'" he says. "I find the term pejorative and provocative and . . . contrary to the spirit of my report."

Romanow underlines one of the lesser-noted recommendations in his report - the call for a "health covenant" setting out clearer rules for medicare. He says the covenant would clarify the Canada Health Act (CHA), which consists of five vague principles subject to widely different interpretations.

For example, health activists say the CHA principle calling for "public administration" of the health system precludes privately run hospitals, while some provinces argue the opposite.

Every province and party professes to support the Canada Health Act yet each interprets the legislation differently, says Romanow, "to the point where the CHA risks becoming an empty shell."

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Globe and Mail Website (December 3, 2002)

Romanow fires back at critics

By ALLISON LAWLOR

Former Saskatchewan premier Roy Romanow fired back Tuesday at critics of his plan for fixing medicare, during what was perhaps his last major public appearance defending his health care report.

Mr. Romanow said some conclusions and recommendations in his report, released last week, have been deliberately misinterpreted.

"Some deliberately mischievous spins have been put on certain of my conclusions and recommendations," Mr. Romanow said in the text of a prepared speech he delivered at Queen's University in Kingston, Ont. on Tuesday.

One day earlier, Senator Michael Kirby publicly criticized Mr. Romanow's failure to explain how to pay for health-care reform, adding that his report had missed the mark on many other issues that are crucial to Canadians.

Mr. Kirby, who headed a Senate committee that prescribed its own cure for the health-care system in October, said Mr. Romanow's Commission on the Future of Health Care inadequately addressed lengthy waiting times for treatment, improperly ruled out any role for private health care and turned a blind eye to the national doctor shortage and crumbling hospital infrastructure.

The Senate committee "recognized that what was needed was not the affirmation of lofty principles and general goals, but to set out in as much detail as possible a plan of action whose cost of implementation would be clear," Mr. Kirby told a Canadian Club luncheon on Monday. "Canadians must not be given the impression that health care is a free good to be paid for out of someone else's pocket."

Both Mr. Romanow and the Senate committee say that the health-care system needs an urgent injection of cash. Mr. Romanow suggested that an additional \$15-billion is required over the next three years and \$6.5-billion annually after that — which is not out of line with the \$5-billion annual increase recommended by the Senate committee.

Mr. Romanow says the money should not come from tax increases and critics have said his recommendations would wipe out the federal surplus.

Mr. Kirby said Canadians should be asked to pay a health premium of as much as \$1,400 a year, depending on income.

In his speech on Tuesday, Mr. Romanow said that his report was "first and foremost about health care."

"Of course, it deals with money and intergovernmental relations, but these are only necessary means to a more important end — improving access to better quality health care for all Canadians," he said.

Mr. Romanow was critical of what he called "the ongoing battles between the federal and provincial governments over the issue of funding" and defended his proposals that call for greater accountability in how federal health dollars are spent.

His recommendation has been met with criticism from some provinces who, allege that it calls for federal intrusion on provincial jurisdiction over health care.

But Mr. Romanow didn't back away from his call for greater accountability on Tuesday.

"What happened to the \$23.4-billion we added to the system just two years ago? Most of it went through a block fund without an accountability framework and without basic agreement on priorities beyond a general intent to increase health care expenditures.

"And where has it gone? What has been achieved from it? How have wait-lists improved, or access been enhanced or quality gotten better? We don't know because as the Auditor-General notes, we have no way of knowing," Mr. Romanow said.

He added: "This isn't a gratuitous criticism of Ottawa or the provinces; it is simply a statement of fact. And Canadians deserve better."

Among other issues addressed in his speech, was the proposed Health Council of Canada. Mr. Romanow objected to claims that he was recommending a 'watchdog agency' to monitor health care.

"The new council would certainly not be a 'watchdog agency' ... the notion is contrary to the spirit of my report, which focuses on collaboration, not policing."

The proposed agency would focus on accountability to the public and not "accountability between one level of government and another."

Mr. Romanow's speech at Queen's University is expected to be his last public appearance to discuss his final report. He plans now to turn the debate over his findings to the public.