

Federal Government Showing the Right Stuff

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Prime Minister Jean Chretien and Health Minister Ann McLellan are demonstrating both courage and wisdom in their determination to implement many of the Romanow Commission's recommendations, the Medical Reform Group said today.

"The federal government has set goals of adding home care to the Canada Health Act, funding uniform access to catastrophic drug coverage, aggressive targets for implementation of primary care reform, and a national health care advisory body to make sure it all happens," said MRG spokesperson Dr. Rosana Pellizzari. "These are all key Romanow recommendations."

The MRG believes that the federal government is right to insist on provincial accountability to the federal government for the money the large transfers to the provinces.

"In the past, the provinces have in effect used federal money intended for health purposes to fund tax cuts," said another MRG spokesperson, Dr. Ahmed Bayoumi. "Romanow and Kirby both insisted that the federal government use its money to buy change. It appears that Ann McLellan is heeding this sound advice."

The federal government may face a battle with the provinces, which want all the federal money with no strings attached. It is clear than some provinces, Ontario for instance, would like to continue their prior practice of using federal transfers to fund tax cuts.

"We strongly encourage Jean Chretien to hang tough in his negotiations with the Premiers," said Dr. Bayoumi. "The federal government has the money, and the popularity of Romanow's wise recommendations, to bolster its bargaining position. There is no reason to back down on any of the key issues."

"The federal government's current stance is the strongest, and the smartest, they have taken for years," Dr. Pellizzari concluded. "If they stick to their guns, all the effort that went in to the Romanow and Kirby reports will prove well worth it."