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Emerging consensus at second Summit: Prevention, better technology, essential to healthcare reform

Streaming video brings St. Louis forum into offices and homes

“The timing for this forum is really propitious,” said Dr. William Peck, co-host along with former Congressman Dick Gephardt at the second in a series of “Summit Conversations” on March 10 in the Edison Theatre of Washington University in St. Louis. “Healthcare reform is seriously on the table for all Americans to think about. This is a great opportunity to consider the issues involved and hopefully to reach a consensus about them.”

A distinguished panel addressed the U.S. healthcare crisis from a broad range of viewpoints and agreed that the staggering growth in health costs is bringing business, labor, health providers and patient advocates to the table with unprecedented interest in reforming American health care. The dialogue revealed noteworthy consensus from all parties about health reform policies ranging from the need for greater emphasis on disease prevention, greater care coordination in managing chronic diseases, improvements in health information technology and the need to restructure patient and provider incentives in a modernized American healthcare system.

“Prevention is where it starts,” said Dr. Peck, founder of the Center for Health Policy at the university. “The earlier the better.”

William Novelli, CEO of AARP, added that real health reform is fundamentally a matter of disease prevention. “Everything else is a patch,” he said.

Steve Lipstein, president and CEO of BJC HealthCare, said “there is a huge education gap.” He said his employees write him asking “why are we wasting all that money on a wellness plan?”

Dr. Gloria Wilder, president and CEO of Core Health, said “I don’t think you can practice 21st century medicine without health IT. Our patients can’t get the health outcomes they deserve if we can’t communicate with each other.”

Gephardt said current implementation of health information technology is “a disaster. Thank God we’ve got \$17 billion in the stimulus bill.”

John Lechleiter, Ph.D., chairman, president and CEO of Eli Lilly and Company, said “we’re seeing trends related to the economic situation; people seeing doctors less frequently, fewer people filling prescriptions and we’re stuck with the problem of people not staying on the medicines that can help them.”

Joseph Hunt, general president of the Iron Workers International Union, said health care has been the No. 1 issue “for the past ten years in our collective bargaining agreements. Dollars that could be going into the pockets of our members are diverted to paying for health care.”

Novelli added his members “are really hurting. They used to be anxious about health care. Now they’re scared.”

Also participating was Dr. Donald Suggs, president, St. Louis American.

Bill Press, widely respected political commentator, moderated the Summit Conversation in St. Louis.

Highlights of the St. Louis Summit, produced by *The America’s Agenda Healthcare Education Fund*, are available at www.summitconversations.org.

The Summit Conversations series on “American Health Care for the 21st Century” was launched January 28 at the University of Miami with President Donna Shalala as host. Upcoming Summits include April 7 at the University of Wisconsin School of Law in Madison with former HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson as host and May 6 at the UCSF School of Medicine in San Francisco hosted by Dr. Stephen L. Hauser, chair, Dept. of Neurology.

PHOTO CAPTION: A distinguished panel addresses the U.S. healthcare crisis at the second in a series of “Summit Conversations” on March 10 in the Edison Theatre of Washington University in St. Louis.