

SPEAKERS SAY THEY DOUBT CONGRESS CAN BE EFFECTIVE IN REMAKING SYSTEM

GROUP CALLS FOR SLOWER PACE ON HEALTH CARE

JOAN BARRON Casper Star-Tribune | Posted: Thursday, August 20, 2009 10:35 pm

CHEYENNE - Slow down on national health care reform and "do it right" was the message Thursday from members of the Coalition to Protect Patients' Rights.

During a news conference at the Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce, the speakers said the nation needs a patient-oriented system involving private insurance companies.

The goal of the coalition, said Dr. Marcy Zwelling-Aamot of California, "is a good local solution where the patient drives the boat."

Zwelling-Aamot downsized her practice in 2004 to set up the Concierge Medicine model to provide more access and attention to a smaller number of patients.

"I couldn't take care of people in five-minute office visits," she said.

The bill before Congress, she said, is a "huge monstrosity" that says little about care.

Zwelling-Aamot wants people to be able to choose their physicians and to have access to a transparent system so they know what services cost.

"Let's do relatively small pieces and do it right," she said.

"The solution you find here in rural Wyoming is not the same as in Long Beach, California," she said.

Another physician, Dr. Jerry Calkins of Cheyenne, suggested that Congress was overreaching in trying to make such drastic changes in a complicated health care system.

"No country in the world the size of the United States has ever taken on such a massive overhaul of the health care system," Calkins said.

Countries like Great Britain and Sweden, which have nationalized health care, have much smaller populations than this country, he said.

Calkins also said that any bill that passed Congress is bound to be "ambiguous" and open to interpretation by the policymakers in Washington.

Dr. Larry Meuli, a pediatrician, former legislator and state public health officer, said a health care system could be modeled after Wyoming's insurance program for children from lower-income families.

Wyoming is one of seven states that have a children's insurance program administered by a private insurance company, not a government entity, Meuli said.

The president of the Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce, Dale Steenbergen, said businesses are interested in reform but are opposed to the public option because they fear increased costs they cannot afford in the current economic climate.

The 250 contractors who belong to the Wyoming Contractors Association are worried that the federal government will come in and run their self-insured health trust, Jonathan Downing said.

"We appreciate the coalition taking the lead," Downing said.

According to coalition literature, the organization is a nonpartisan, grass-roots coalition of patients, health care professionals, advocacy groups and engaged citizens who are concerned about the debate going on in Washington.

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