

Clinton health care plan is bad news, panelists say

BY RALPH R. ECHTINAW
STAFF WRITER

The panelists at U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg's forum on health care Monday had one big thing in common: They don't like President Bill Clinton's gestating health care plan.

The panel spoke to a crowd of more than 350 business persons and doctors at Glen Oaks golf course in Farmington Hills.

"The federal programs we already have (Medicare, Medicaid, et al.) are the programs that have messed up the system," said Jack Strayer, the director of federal affairs for the Council for Affordable Health Insurance, representing 30 health insurance companies.

"How does it help Americans to provide them health insurance and deny them jobs?" said Nancy McKeague, director of government relations for the Michigan Chamber of Commerce.

"The Clinton Administration does not believe that the marketplace will keep costs down. It's difficult to see where the market is left in 'managed competition,'" said Susan Adelman, a

pediatrician and past president of the Michigan State Medical Society. "Bureaucracy and waste go hand in hand with the federal government and health care," said Karl Albrecht, a vice president with Action Benefits Co. of Southfield.

Knollenberg keeps cool

Knollenberg, a Republican who often issues press releases denouncing Clinton Administration policies, emceed the forum in staid, non-acerbic style, leaving the criticism to his panelists. Adelman, who was part of a 47-member Health Professionals Review Group that critiqued the work of Hillary Clinton's Health Care Task Force, probably knows more than the other three panelists what form the ultimate Clinton plan will take.

Although "it's difficult to see what's going to come out at the end of the grinder," she said, "the system I saw in Washington is a one-payer system."

Adelman anticipates a system where one or several government organizations

called "health care alliances" negotiate deals with health care providers to buy insurance. "You then have one regionalized one-care system which is no different from Canada," she said. "The choice will be the choice of health care plans, not doctors."

Government's to blame

Albrecht, the insurance company vice president, said the main cause of rising health care costs is that the federal government doesn't reimburse doctors 100 percent for services provided under Medicare and Medicaid. Doctors and hospitals, he said, make up the difference by overcharging privately insured patients.

"If the federal government doesn't pay its fair share, that's going to show up in all of our premiums," he said.

Neither is Albrecht confident that the Clinton Administration will design a good plan. "They have a tendency to play games, and there's only one Joe (Knollenberg) to protect us up there," he said.

Oxymorons in Washington

McKeague, the chamber of commerce government relations director, said the term "managed competition" in health care is an oxymoron. "Business needs incentives not mandates," she said, and the Clinton Administration only "pretends to be sensitive to the needs of small business."

Strayer, the insurance industry lobbyist, said "the real problem with American health care is American people."

In the current health-care system, Strayer said, patients are like pets who control medical bills are. The insurance companies are like pet owners who pay the bills. "I think it's time we become a big dog and begin controlling medical costs," he said.

To that end, Strayer recommends something called a "medical IRA" that individuals would contribute before-tax income to, then use the savings to pay medical bills. Only after a certain threshold is reached (Strayer suggests \$3,000) would traditional insurance kick in and pay the rest.

In essence, it's a \$3,000 deductible, but

individuals would be permitted to keep the medical IRA money they don't spend.

'Killing small business'

Lois Grant, who works for Realtron of Redford, liked what she heard the panelists say. Increases in the cost of health insurance are "killing small business," she said, but the Clinton plan is a no-win situation.

Rudy Gerhard is a co-owner of Viscount Industries in Farmington Hills. Viscount pays more than \$10,000 a month for the health insurance of 28 employees.

And if the cost keeps rising? "We either charge for it, or we make less money, or we go out of business," Gerhard said. "I hope somebody can come up with a solution."

Richard Heppie, the president of Superior Consultant Co. of Farmington Hills, joined everyone else in criticizing Clinton's plan. Rather than simplifying the system, Heppie said, the plan will add another layer of bureaucracy. "It's crazy," he said.

Engler appoints former judge to Michigan Board of Ethics

BY RALPH R. ECHTINAW
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Former Oakland County Circuit Judge Alice Gilbert has been appointed by Gov. John Engler to the state board of ethics.

The board's duty is to hear and investigate complaints about unethical conduct by the state government's 60,000 employees.

The board generally meets four times a year and hears eight to 12 cases, said John Truscott, a

spokesman for Engler. The board issues six to eight "advisory opinions" a year, and the recommendations are usually followed, Truscott said. Gilbert's term on the board begins immediately and expires Feb. 7, 1997.

"I'm pleased that the governor has confidence in my ability to handle ethical issues for state employees," Gilbert said. "I consider the appointment a high compliment."

Gilbert, 60, a West Bloomfield Township resident, currently serves as counsel to the law firm of Hyman & Lippitt. Before that she was a circuit judge from 1976 to 1992, when she resigned to run for U.S. congress.

Girl Scouts honor 6 area women

Six area women were recently honored by the Northern Oakland Girl Scout Council at the "Women of Distinction Golf Classic" fund-raising event.

They are: Marilyn J. Dumas, a veteran volunteer, first and founding president of the Michigan Chapter of the National Sudden

Infant Death Association, Farmington Hills. Jean Hansen, president and CEO of Hansen & Associates law firm and Advancer's International Ltd., Bloomfield Hills. Maria E. Leonbauer, corporate public relations manager for Volkswagen of America Inc., Auburn Hills.

Alice F. Steloff, president, publisher and editor-in-chief of Metropolitan Woman Magazine, Southfield. Judge Hilda Gage, Oakland County Circuit Court. Jeanette Morrison-Marks, Fund Distribution United Way of Oakland County (1944-1993), Clarkston. (Posthumously.)

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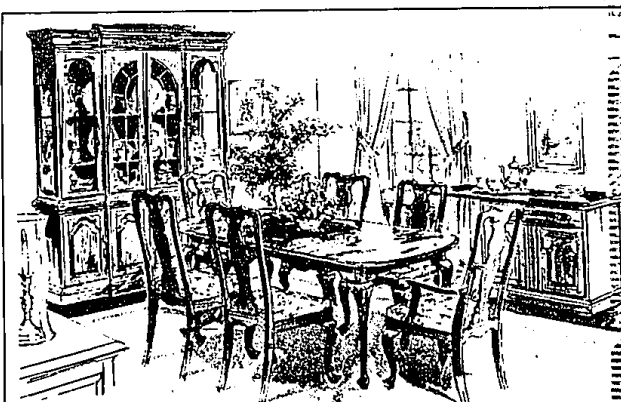
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