

Health reform group promotes understanding

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SALT LAKE CITY -- The health care debate is now boiling on the nation's front burner, and it's beginning to warm up in Utah as well. On Tuesday there was a statewide conference in seven locations, connected electronically, aimed at kick-starting the discussion.

It's a topic that's overwhelming and confusing to many people and has several evolving reform proposals under discussion. At Tuesday's conference, a health care policy group tried to get people talking about issues that will affect all of us.

In some respects, Utah residents who need health care are a bit ahead of the country, as President Obama noted last week. "Places like the Geisner Health System in rural Pennsylvania and the Intermountain Health in Salt Lake City, where high-quality care is being provided at a cost well below the national average," Obama pointed out.

But the nonprofit Utah Health Policy Project says Utahns still need to tune in to the national debate.

"We do lead the nation in delivering quality care at the lowest cost. But ultimately, when you come right down to it, health care isn't cheap here in Utah either; 92 percent of Utahns are concerned about the cost of health care," said Jessica Kendrick, with the Utah Health Policy Project.

Here are the key points of discussion in Congress:

- Most proposals require insurance for all Americans.
- Bills in both the House and Senate call for sweeping reform of private insurance, including new rules on coverage and limits on premiums.
- The biggest battle is over a government insurance plan.

The theory is government insurance would compete with insurance companies and hold down costs. One bill tries to accomplish that same purpose with non-profit insurance cooperatives.

Other advocates reject government insurance completely, saying it would undermine the private insurance most Americans rely on.

"There's a lot of rhetoric, definitely, flying back and forth. But our ultimate position is: Let's put politics aside and find a solution," Kendrick said.

That's easy to say but tough to pull off. There was similar pressure and momentum for reform once before, but it crashed and burned. That was early in the Clinton administration, a decade and a half ago.

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