

UTAH HEALTH POLICY PROJECT

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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Tuesday April 28, 2009

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RESPONSE TO UTAH SPEAKER OF HOUSE DAVID CLARK'S AND DR. BRENT JAMES' TESTIMONY TO CONGRESS

Salt Lake City, UT –Today's discussion on national health reform in the Senate HELP (Health, Education, Labor, Pension) Committee focused on the experiences of early reforming states, specifically Massachusetts, Vermont, California--and *Utah*.

Committee members heard from Utah Speaker of the House David Clark, leader of Utah's reform efforts, and Dr. Brent James, an international authority on cost containment and value-based clinical decision making. In his testimony Speaker Clark asked the Federal Government to respect the starting point of each individual state.

"To Speaker Clark's point, we would say that the problem is just too big and too expensive on the front-end for states to manage all on their own. Congress should first set a baseline and standards for reforms but then give states the 'federalist' option to design reforms within these parameters," says Judi Hilman, Executive Director of UHPP.

"It will help our process here in Utah if the Feds were to tell us, YES, reforms must have the goal of universal coverage; YES everyone should have access to a reasonable and affordable level of health care coverage; and YES, risk must be shared as a community. As long as states meet these and other basic parameters, then and only then should states be free to design and implement reforms on their terms," Hilman adds.

Given the current makeup and leadership of Congress, national reforms will likely hew closely to the Massachusetts template, in particular the emphasis on universal access to affordable coverage as a first step in reform. Nonetheless, today's testimony confirmed UHPP's assumptions: that Utah has critical insights to bring to the discussion, especially around cost containment, and quality improvement. Speaker Clark made a similar point with reference to the fact that Utah has the lowest costs and best health outcomes in the nation.

As Dr. Brent James from Intermountain Health Care noted in his testimony, decreasing utilization rates and enacting payment reform are key steps towards controlling cost and increasing quality. To this end, doctors must have access to the latest research that compares the clinical and cost effectiveness of different types of treatments. That will help doctors and patients choose the best treatment and make more informed choices rather than waste money on less effective treatments.

A federalist approach would give Utah the freedom to implement reforms based on Utah's strengths in this area and unique features of our market, while meeting critical reform goals around cost-effective coverage for everyone. Comprehensive health system reform *this year* is the key to economic recovery.

Listen to today's hearing [here](#)

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