



Gibbons Capitol Report
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Making Sure All Missourians Have Available, Affordable Healthcare

We hold among our highest priorities the effort to reform our healthcare system in Missouri. The Medicaid Reform Commission recently issued its report. It is a remarkable document. It is available on the Senate website(www.senate.mo.gov/medicaidreform) and I invite every Missourian to read the commission's goals for a new healthcare system. Of particular note are some lofty objectives: that all the people of Missouri should have available, affordable healthcare; and that the central focus of healthcare should change, to keeping people healthy and preventing illness, rather than only treating them when they are sick.

This is why I invited former U.S. Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich to address the Senate Wednesday. As co-founder of the Center for Health Transformation, Speaker Gingrich advocates for a 21st Century Intelligent Health System that saves lives and saves money. He commended our state's work in reforming our healthcare system and encouraged our legislature to focus on individual, preventative and innovative care.

Last session I proposed an amendment to SB 539 that would sunset Medicaid in 2008 because I believe a sense of urgency is necessary to bring the much needed transformational change to our healthcare system. My amendment passed, and now leaders in the Missouri Senate are working diligently to restructure and redesign a new innovative healthcare system for all Missourians. The former Speaker recognized our efforts for true, fundamental change and shares our vision for personalizing healthcare. In his speech to the Senate, Speaker Gingrich said everyone should have more choices of higher quality at lower cost. He spoke of a new system that would increase efficiency and improve quality of life through personal responsibility. He said he thinks that we have to re-establish a sense of citizen responsibility. Simply put, he pointed to the old saying that nobody ever washes a rental car. I agree.

We are fortunate as Missourians to be in a position to be national leaders in healthcare reform, and we have taken the first bold steps to make that change a reality. We have the opportunity to lead the way to a 21st Century healthcare system and improve the quality of life for all the people of Missouri.

Using Modern Day Technology

Speaker Gingrich also emphasized the importance of technology, especially for medical records in healthcare reform. His motto is simple: Paper kills. The governor last week recommended \$25 million for a healthcare technology fund. A task force has been created to best determine how to invest the money from the fund to use 21st century technology so we have personalized, available and affordable healthcare for all Missourians. Looking at the Hurricane Katrina disaster, consider a family from New Orleans who packed their car with all the belongings they could cram in and escaped to Houston. Whatever was not in their car was destroyed. Yet, if their car was serviced by Jiffy Lube in New Orleans, they could go to one in Houston and know exactly when they last changed the oil, the wipers, and rotated the tires. But they can't even begin to find out when they last had a tetanus shot; those paper records are gone. In the 21st century, it is unacceptable for Jiffy Lube to be more technologically advanced than our healthcare system.

The Institute of Medicine says between 44,000 and 98,000 people each year die because of errors in paper medical records. This is an outrage. Going to electronic medical records and e-prescribing are examples of reforms we must make - they save lives, improve health and save precious tax dollars for the people who really need the help. We will also create severe and vicious penalties for anyone who would try to hack into anyone's personal medical records.

Eliminating Healthcare Fraud

We must make sure that our limited funding is not being stolen from the people who need it most. Last year we took the first step in cracking down on fraud by requiring annual reverifications which to date have recovered an estimated \$104 million dollars, meaning illegal aliens, those who earn too much, or those who don't live in our state will no longer steal money from poor people in Missouri. We have also established the Senate Special Committee to Investigate Medicaid Fraud. They will begin meeting in the next few weeks to begin uncovering how much money is being stolen from poor Missourians, including those providing the care. The committee will also seek vigorous prosecution of all those who cheat and steal from the people of Missouri.

Speaker Gingrich's visit and speech brought incredible ideas and much needed attention to the real work that is taking place to build a new healthcare system in Missouri for everyone. His visions, in tandem with ours, help inspire us on our path to a better healthcare system that provides available, affordable healthcare for all Missourians.