

American News
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No simple health-care solutions

Daschle, public agree: System too complicated

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If the public doesn't understand what the federal health-care reform bill calls for, maybe the blame lies with the people who wrote it, an insurance professional said.

"It's not fair to the public," Lonnie McKittrick said Tuesday night in Aberdeen at a town all meeting on the issue. "Have you read the bill? It's a thousand-plus pages that we can't understand, and we wonder why this is confusing?"

His questions elicited some of the most resounding applause at the gathering of about 260 in the theater at Johnson Fine Arts Center at Northern State University.

McKittrick represented the Independent Insurance Agents of South Dakota on a seven-member panel that included Aberdeen native Tom Daschle, a former U.S. senator.

If people don't get it, maybe those who drafted the House bill need to do a better job of explain-

ing, Daschle said. However, health-care reform is so complicated it requires lots of pages, he said. An explanation of the nation's existing health-care existing system would require thousands upon thousands of pages, Daschle said.

Outside the Johnson center, roughly 30 opponents of the universal health-care bill used few words to convey their messages; they carried signs as meeting-goers parked and entered the building.

Doug Hoikkala of Aberdeen said the country can't afford a government health-care program. The federal government has already driven Social Security and Medicare into the ground and would do the same with health care, he said. And he sees it as a step to even more government programs.

"What they really want is socialism," said Hoikkala, who added that he is a former Democrat who is now a registered independent,

Kenneth Pullman of Aberdeen had similar concerns. An Army veteran, he said more government control means less individual freedom.

Pullman said he doesn't want the government telling him which doctor he can see, when and where he can go to the doctor and what treatments he's entitled to.





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Zoe Cope, 17, of Aberdeen, is one of the leaders of the South Dakota Teenage Republicans. She said she has concerns that the high cost of government-run health care would ultimately be paid for by people her age.

Interaction between opponents of universal health care and those attending the forum was civil.

Most of the signs opponents carried were health care-related and said things like "No Obamacare," "Free Health Care Is Not Free," "Just Say No To Government Insurance," "Stop Socialized Medicine," and "My Doctor Works For Me." A couple, though, targeted Daschle. One said, "Tired of Tom." Another read, "Tom the Tax Cheat," referencing the fact that unpaid tax bills derailed President Obama's nomination of Daschle to be secretary of health.

Back inside, one thing was clear to Dr. Tom Huber, president-elect of the South Dakota State Medical Association. The health-care bill allows

doctors to talk to patients about end-of-life issues and whether expensive care should continue. There comes a time when costly medical services make no difference, he said, and these end-of-life costs play a role in the rising costs of health care nationwide. That does not mean a doctor would quit caring for a dying patient, and it does not mean euthanasia, Huber said.

A Medicare patient, on average, incurs 25 percent to 30 percent of her or his lifetime medical bills in the last 30 days of life, Huber said.

McKittrick said he hopes for regional and local control of health-care reform — a comment that also prompted brisk applause.

"Problems nationally are not necessarily problems in South Dakota."

Even so, the independent insurance agent organization he leads does not oppose reform he said. not oppose problems nationally are not necessarily problems in South Dakota.

The meeting was the first event of a project called Conversations on Health Care sponsored by South Dakota Public Broadcasting and AARP. The meeting and numerous related programs will air on public radio and television. Go to sdpb.org for details.