



Ex-Missouri Congressman Gephardt in Iowa, touting "medical innovation"

by O. KAY HENDERSON on NOVEMBER 20, 2009
in POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Former Missouri Congressman Richard Gephardt is in Iowa today, meeting with educators, doctors and others in the health care industry.

"Our ['Council for American Medical Innovation'](#) brings together disease groups, universities, pharmaceutical companies, biotech companies, research foundations — to try to advance the cause of medical innovation in America," Gephardt says.

Members of the Iowa Biotechnology Association, along with Governor Culver and officials from the University of Iowa and Iowa State University held a midday forum in Des Moines which Gephardt moderated. Gephardt says there must be reform of the government regulatory system — the "testing regime" in particular — so medical innovations can "meet-up" with new science.

"There are going to be less big, blockbuster drugs. There are going to be more targeted drugs that will only work on you and other people who have your particular disease, and that means you've got to have a different testing regime," Gephardt says. "I also think there needs to be more collaboration between the government and the pharmaceuticals and the biotech companies to come up with new answers."

Gephardt was the leader of the U.S. House in 1994 when President Clinton pushed for health care reform, but the House failed to pass a bill. Gephardt says he called the top Democrats in the U.S. House two weeks ago when a health care reform package cleared the House.

"I think (President Obama) has done a really good job of, you know, staying out of congress' way, giving them general direction, not being highly specific," Gephardt says, "and also getting some of the big stakeholders like the doctors, like the hospitals, like the pharmaceutical companies to be supporters this time when last time they were all against it."

Gephardt left congress in 2004 after staging a second bid for the White House. He dropped out of the 2004 presidential race shortly after his fourth-place finish in the Iowa Caucuses. Some of Gephardt's fellow Democrats have questioned his decision to work for the drug industry

"I think having good pharmaceutical answers to big problems like Alzheimers and cancer is really what we need to do," Gephardt says. "The pharmaceutical companies aren't right on every issue, but they're right on a lot of issues and the ones that I've dealt with are really interested in innovation. They want to find answers, faster, to big disease problems and I think that's a very positive thing."

Gephardt is also a consultant to [UnitedHealthcare](#), one of the nation's largest Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs).

"Any company has its critics. I think UnitedHealthcare delivers really good service in many places in the country. No one is perfect. No one does everything exactly right every day," Gephardt says. "But the organization of health care is one of our greatest needs."

According to Gephardt, it's a "step in the right direction" if health care delivery can be "organized" by companies like UnitedHealth.

Gephardt made his comments this morning during taping of the ["Iowa Press" program](#) which airs tonight at 7:30 on Iowa Public Television.

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