

## **For immediate release**

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## **Public, private focus defines presidential health care debate**

Representatives backing the national health care reform plans of presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama battled Tuesday over everything from government mandates and the costs of care to the uninsured and how America's current health system ranks against the rest of the world.

In a feisty exchange before 300 doctors, nurses, students and staff at the Anschutz Medical Campus in Aurora, Dr. Irwin Redlener, a senior health care advisor to Obama, and Linda Gorman, a health care policy specialist for the free-market Independence Institute, politely disagreed on almost every point.

Redlener said 45 million uninsured Americans represented a problem that had to be addressed. He said that the American health care system didn't measure up to the rest of the world in terms of life expectancy and infant mortality. He reviewed Obama's plan to allow people to keep their existing health coverage if they liked it, mandate health insurance coverage for children and allow the uninsured to buy insurance as part of huge national pools of participants, none of whom could be excluded from coverage because of prior existing conditions.

Stressing that she didn't represent McCain, but that she did represent the Republican candidate's free-market approach to health care reform, Gorman countered that the uninsured was "not a good way to go" in starting the health care reform debate. She pointed out that the way countries count infant mortality differs and that the U.S. had better cancer survival rates than most of the world. She also characterized England's and Canada's national health care plans as failing in the provision of "advanced care."

"Expensive regulation by government is the problem," Gorman told the crowd gathered in an auditorium at the University of Colorado Denver School of Medicine.

She pronounced McCain's proposal to treat employer contributions to employees' health insurance as taxable income while providing a \$5,000 per family tax credit fairer than Obama's health plan. She called untaxed health insurance benefits "a major tax loophole for the rich," a statement with which Redlener strongly disagreed.

Gorman questioned whether increasing the size of insurance pools, as Obama plans, will truly reduce the cost of premiums to participants. She called for individuals to be able to determine how much health insurance they needed, not the government. She said she was

satisfied with her family's privately purchased health insurance plan, which costs \$6,500 a year in premiums and includes a \$7,000 deductible.

"I am considered underinsured by definition," Gorman explained.

Gorman called McCain's private market driven program "a bridge from employer-based plans to individual health insurance plans."

Said Gorman, a former member of the Colorado commission on health care reform: "I'd rather have a private system."

Redlener, an Associate Dean for Public Health at Columbia University, said a typical family health insurance plans costs roughly \$12,000 a year in premiums. He added that McCain's tax credit program only increased as much as the cost of living from year to year, while the cost of medical care has been rising by multiples of that index. For instance, he said, wage growth in America from 2000 to 2007 was 24 percent, while the growth in insurance premiums was 98 percent.

At least 80 million people in America are uninsured or underinsured, Redlener said. "A four-state study of foreclosures showed that 50 percent happened because of medical costs," he added.

Gorman blamed the growth in medical costs, which now stands at more than \$2 trillion a year in the U.S., on increased government regulation and "third-party payment" systems.

"The Obama plan doesn't do anything to attack either of these," Gorman said.

Redlener and Gorman even tangled over mandating health insurance coverage for children with Gorman saying parents could be punished for not providing the precise amount of coverage dictated by the government.

Redlener said there are "medical and moral reasons to mandate coverage for children."

The School of Medicine's LEADS program sponsored the debate.

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