



*CQ Healthbeat News*

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Leaders from business, labor and health care provider communities announced Tuesday a list of health care priorities that members say are nonpartisan, common sense goals for any overhaul legislation.

Lawmakers and the public should focus on these goals to avoid the political fighting that killed Clinton-era health overhaul attempts, members of America's Agenda said at a news conference to introduce the priorities.

Priorities include federal leadership on a chronic disease prevention initiative and a plan to improve efficiency of care, strengthening of comprehensive primary health care, implementation of a uniform health information technology program and guaranteed access to health care for all Americans.

"We can't leave this issue, as we did in 1993 and 1994, as a total failure," said Richard A. Gephardt, who served as House majority leader during the health overhaul attempts of the early 1990s. "There is a consensus on what I call the foundation that has to be built. The foundation is cost control and quality of health care."

The proposals were drafted after America's Agenda held a series of discussions beginning in January to discuss health care-related issues such as the economy, disease prevention, information technology and health care access.

America's Agenda Executive Director Mark Blum said the group, which has also tackled health care issues on the state level, has experienced success when it frames discussion around the major goals of health overhaul instead of hot-button issues that alienate some people.

Blum said people from different parties and ideological standpoints will disagree on how to best implement health overhaul. Debates have already formed around a proposed public insurance option, whether to mandate universal coverage and how to finance the overhaul.

J. Randall MacDonald, senior vice president for human resources at IBM — who could not attend the news conference because of weather and spoke via telephone — said the business community strongly opposes a proposal to tax employer insurance benefits.

Blum said the group supports a bill ([S 803](#)) introduced by Sen. [Tom Harkin](#), D-Iowa, that would provide a tax credit to employers who implement wellness programs promoting physical activity, nutritious diet and other healthy behaviors in the home.

“We’ve got a disease system, and we’ve got to go to a wellness system,” said Tommy Thompson, former governor of Wisconsin and Secretary of Health and Human Services under George W. Bush.

IBM and Textron, a multi-industry company that owns Cessna Aircraft Company, among others, have seen cost-saving success and a healthier workforce as a result of similar programs, said MacDonald and John Butler, a vice president at Textron.