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## Common ground possible for reform

By Corrie Edwards

Tensions surrounding health reform have exploded recently as legislators and President Obama continue to rally for public support. Americans seem unwilling to accept broad reform, but new research actually shows that Americans may be more ready than we think.

What they need is a chance to work through the tough choices involved in health reform. Once they do, not only are they open to significant change, they are willing to make substantial compromises involved in creating a health system that works for everyone.

Kansas residents cite three sticking points around reforming health care: Most are ambivalent about the government's role in health care. Those with good coverage are concerned about losing it. They are concerned about costs and how to pay for a health care system they want.

Unless the public is able to come to grips with these concerns, reform is unlikely to pass, let alone be sustainable.

Recently, two area organizations, the Kansas Health Consumer Coalition and the Kansas Health Institute, took part in groundbreaking research to understand how everyday Americans think about these complicated and emotional issues and how they move along the learning curve from initial opinion to considered judgment.

This multistate project, sponsored by a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and conducted in conjunction with the nationally known research firm Viewpoint Learning, showed that people can work through these sticking points.

In Overland Park, Pittsburg and Garden City, researchers sat down with randomly selected representative groups of Kansans and asked them to consider various scenarios for the future of the U.S. health care system. Over the course of a daylong meeting, people from widely different walks of life were able to work through the major obstacles and define health care reforms that made sense to them.

We saw Kansans arrive at significant common ground. In particular, they all agreed we are already paying dearly for a broken and unsustainable system, that health care should focus on prevention and wellness, that we must make more effective use of limited resources, and that government will need to play a stronger role. Kansans' conclusions about health care reform were consistent with those reached in Ohio and Mississippi, the two other states in this project.

Conventional wisdom predicts deep divisions between red and blue states, urban and rural communities, liberals and conservatives, the insured and uninsured. But it turns out that Americans agree far more than they disagree when it comes to health care reform.

This research shows that most Kansans are ready and willing to accept difficult trade-offs, and that they support substantial changes once they work through the issues. They need Kansas' leaders to help them move along the learning curve — building on the extensive common ground that already exists. If Kansas' leaders can do that, our state and all of America will benefit.

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