



Kennedy to offer HIT bill

By [Jack Beaudoin](#) | March 01, 2004 | 12:00 AM



Congressman Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) said he never thought he'd agree with former Republican House Speaker Newt Gingrich on anything. At the 2004 HIMSS Annual Conference and Exhibition in Orlando, Kennedy admitted he was wrong.

"Newt Gingrich is right," he said at a keynote address on Feb. 26. "Healthcare needs to be run more like a business. We need to apply business models to the health care system."

Kennedy noted that every year, American businesses spend \$1,400 per employee on healthcare "that has no clinical value." He called it a \$515 billion tax on employers that would run to \$7.4 trillion over the next decade.

"Our healthcare system produces great medicine," Kennedy told his audience, "but it does so unevenly, with massive inefficiencies and mistakes."

Not surprisingly, the five-term congressman said the solution to most of the problems could be found in information technology. Kennedy pledged to introduce new legislation, titled "The Quality, Efficiency, Standards, and Technology for Healthcare Transformation Act (QUEST)," which would infuse billions of dollars into a national healthcare IT infrastructure by 2015. The bill calls for and would fund the creation of a "fully wireless, fully paperless" electronic health record, standardized reporting, evidence-based medicine regulations and "payment practices to get quality out of the system."

Kennedy, who was interrupted on several occasions by applause, called his plan for healthcare transformation "a necessity, not a luxury... We can no longer ask doctors to practice medicine in the dark."

He said the QUEST Act would institute a number of structural changes that would reduce duplication, eliminate errors from clinical support software, foster establishment of best practice guidelines for providers, give public health agencies a way to rapidly detect and respond to bio-terrorism threats, provide data to measure and repair provider performance, and cut down on administrative costs such as transcription and billing.

Presumably, the bill would require a huge commitment of federal funding, although Kennedy shied away from specifics. He did say the reforms would remedy massive inefficiencies that currently exist in the system and lead to improved quality and better clinical outcomes – and also squeeze out some of the billions of dollars in waste found in the system today.

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