

Mark Masselli: This is Conversations on Healthcare. I am Mark Masselli.

Margaret Flinter: I am Margaret Flinter.

Mark Masselli: Margaret, we are four months out from Healthcare Reform passage. The polls are drifting up but you know it feels a little like a high level chess match with both sides positioning their pieces. We saw the Republican Senators on the judiciary committee try to box in Supreme Court Nominee Elena Kagan asking her to recuse herself on all future healthcare related matters. She demurred and she said she didn't work on any health reform matters as solicitor general and the President moved to protect the Health Reform Bill by putting his field general in place Don Berwick bypassing this senate procedures. There are hundreds of decisions that need to be made to implement the bill if they are going to be successful.

Margaret Flinter: And do you know I was thinking this morning it's just about the one-year anniversary since the house first released its version of the bill last July so certainly a very eventful year. And to that two-dimensional chess game they talked about I think they actually be a three-dimensional one because the states are playing such a huge role here and what a difference we say state to state. We have 21 states that are getting ready, preparing for health exchanges and setting up commissions to oversee the whole health reform implementation process. Now on the other hand, we have about 20 states that are filing suits saying the Health Reform Bill is unconstitutional and can't go forward as it is. So we are going to have a very interesting time getting back to the Supreme Court discussion seeing what happens on response to those states.

Mark Masselli: And you know the benefits are still rolling out for the Health Reform Bill. 4 million small businesses were notified that they might be eligible for a tax credit to defray the cost of health insurance and a few 100,000 Medicare Beneficiaries who have reached that Doughnut Hole in Medicare coverage will be getting a check for \$250 quite soon.

Margaret Flinter: Well, that will certainly make some people happy. And now we are going to turn to some of who I consider a consummate chess player on the American Political Landscape and that's an American Leader of many decades Lowell Weicker, Former Connecticut Governor, US Senator and currently the President of the Trust for America's Health. The trust has been working to modernize the public health system in America and bring prevention solidly back to the Center of Health and Healthcare. The trust addresses a range of issues and scores how well states do in investing an effective public health measures. They are known for those public health report cards and also their aptly named F as in Fat report the tracks obesity trends and policies.

Mark Masselli: No matter what the story, you can hear all of our shows on our website chcradio.com. You can subscribe to iTunes to get the show regularly downloaded or if you would like to hang onto our every word and read a transcript of one of our shows, come visit us at chcradio.com.

Mark Masselli: And as always if you have got feedback, e-mail us at chcradio.com, we would love to hear from you. Now, before we speak with Governor Weicker, let's check in with our producer Loren Bonner for the headline news.

Loren Bonner: I am Loren Bonner with this week's headline news. The administration announced new regulations under healthcare reform that will require health plans to cover recommended prevention services with no co-pays deductibles or other out of pocket fees. The rules would extend this prevention benefit to 31 million people in new employer sponsored plans and to 10 million people in new individual plans next year. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius says the administration is laying the foundation to help transform America's healthcare system into one that focuses on every American healthy.

Kathleen Sebelius: It's in our best interest as a country to make recommended preventive care widely available to make it affordable and to make it convenient for American consumers and that's what we are trying to do.

Loren Bonner: The rules will eliminate co-payments deductibles and other charges for blood pressure, diabetes and cholesterol tests, many cancer screenings, routine vaccinations, prenatal care and regular wellness visits for infants and children. Other services offered at no cost also include counseling to help people stop smoking, screening and counseling for obesity and HIV testing. And the President is committed to combating AIDS with his own domestic HIV/AIDS plan. He announced a new national strategy last week that calls for AIDS Relief in three major ways.

President Barack Obama: Reducing the HIV infections, improving care for people living with HIV/AIDS, narrowing health disparities. These are the central goals of our national strategy.

Loren Bonner: The CDC estimated that 1.1 million Americans were living with HIV/AIDS in 2006. Although annual AIDS deaths have declined the number of the people living with HIV is growing. HIV/AIDS advocates say the healthcare reform legislation is an important step for people living with HIV but more resources need to be dedicated to fighting the disease especially in communities of color. The national action plan will redirect money to population groups at the greatest risk including gay and bisexual men and minorities. The announcement comes as state programs that provide AIDS drugs to patients with HIV grapple with growing waiting lists for the critical medication that decreases the spread

of HIV and prevents the progression to HIV. Secretary Sebelius announced last week that she will provide \$25 million to states to help pay for the drug treatments which average more than \$12,000 a year. This week on Conversations on Healthcare we are exploring public health and what efforts are being made to improve this system. The Trust for America's Health is a National Leader on this front and the organization has recognized the need for stronger prevention and public health preparedness policies in order to improve the health of all Americans as we transition our health care system into one that provides better healthcare to all. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of legislation is aligned with the trust goal to expand investments in prevention and public health programs. Included in the legislation is the prevention and public health fund \$50 billion over the next 10 years to support prevention and public health programs. According to Jeff Levi, the trust's Executive Director, this could translate into anything from a national campaign to promote immunizations and a better understanding of the safety of vaccines to a narrower neighborhood approach that puts lights in a playground or negotiates a mixed use agreement with a school so the playground can be open after hours. The goal is to build healthier communities with a particular emphasis on eliminating barriers to good health for low income residents. However, the administration recently announced that a significant portion of this year's prevention funds will go toward healthcare workforce issues instead of the original intent to allocate the money toward community prevention and public health. Only half the money \$250 million will go toward community and clinical prevention public health infrastructure, research and public health training, the other \$250 million will go toward workforce development. The trust's CEO Jeff Levi said that they will work with the administration to make sure that next year's funds will be strictly allocated to investing in specific community prevention programs like the newly authorized community transformation grants, also expanding state and local health departments as they move toward accreditation and creating a new program of public health services and systems research. Let's turn now to our interview with today's guest the President of Trust for America's Health Governor Lowell Weicker to learn more about America's future public health system.

Mark Masselli: This is Conversations on Healthcare. Today we are speaking with Lowell Weicker former US Senator and Governor of Connecticut and current President of Trust for America's health a non-profit non-partisan public health policy organization. Welcome Governor Weicker. You left an impressive legacy during your years in the United States senate. You help shaped the Americans with Disability Act and played a major role in strengthening the National Institute of Health. After leaving office you took on a new cause public health. You are now president of the Trust for America's Health which is working to modernize the public health system in America. With national health reform now underway what's the major focus of the trust for America's health and how does public health fit into the federal health reform legislation?

Lowell Weicker: Well, it has a large place in the legislation that was passed in the sense that big chunk of it goes to what is known as community transformation grants in the sense of being able to go ahead and shape the community to keep people healthy bicycle pass, playgrounds, the types of facilities which encourage physical activity. It's also true that the public health piece in the legislation addresses prevention rather than cure. And obviously prevention is much, much cheaper than the cure process. You know I am going to use this occasion to site something that was said to be within the last 24 hours. So I can make a point to all your listeners as to the healthcare legislation. This person was opposed to the legislation and didn't want any healthcare legislation. And I said well, I said I am not there. I said I certainly agree that there are many parts of the healthcare legislation that could be improved. Maybe there should be some additions but to go ahead and say no to the entire concept just suffice reality in the United States of America. And this person turned to me and said well I would rather go ahead and tear the whole build down and then start building a new bill. If this individual realized the years that has taken us to get to this point where healthcare becomes a priority for all Americans, you just wouldn't make a comment like that. You know I think that's a prevailing attitude among many people especially in the political sense. So, I want to make clear that nobody is stating that what's out there now is perfect. But it's a hell of an important step forward and that's to me the main thing. The train is on the track and that's the first time that's happened.

Mark Masselli: That's a great observation.

Margaret Flinter: Yes, thank you. And governor, this past decade, even the past couple of years, certainly a real wakeup call about the need to bring the public health system into the 21st century I think of bioterrorism and H1N1, the natural disasters as well as all of the chronic diseases that call for a strong public health response. Well, really interested to know about the Healthier America Project of the Trust for America's Health. It includes a blueprint for Healthier America really modernizing the federal public health system. What progress have you seen with that modernization in the last few years and what do you think we can look forward to in the coming couple of years?

Lowell Weicker: Well as you know we have issued several reports on the component parts of a total plan, obesity, smoking these types of matters which are prevention. Do I see well let's take for example let's just take the public health grading of the systems in the 50 states. We issue a report card for every state. And quite frankly the results are varied from year to year. The report card is based on what money is devoted to public health in a particular state. How many public health experts are there in the state? What do they do to get people to come into the public health system and so on and so on. So that had an impact on what the states are doing here and it has somebody looking over their shoulder trying to protect the public interest and sometimes the states have done very well and the next year they just fall off the map because they figure they cut all the funding for public health. One thing that bothers me for example, in the

current economic climate, is the public health is going to be one of the first things to be tossed out of the window. And that will be disastrous in terms of where we go health wise. It's important to know for example on one aspect of public health, the obesity which we have touched upon that this generation of young Americans born now has a lower life expectancy than those before. Well that will give you an idea to the importance of addressing obesity.

Mark Masselli: Governor, as you noted one of the big focuses of the Trust for American Health is prevention policies. You have worked with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, you released a new public opinion survey which finds that Americans rank prevention as the most important healthcare reform priority and overwhelmingly in support increasing funding. But the same time I know you are very concerned as a former governor. And you just mentioned that now about the fiscal realities that the state governments will face many of whom are going to be forced to cut spending. What advice do you have to your fellow college, your fellow governors about what they should do in terms of how to prioritize prevention in public health activities in the CEF rating that they have.

Lowell Weicker: Well the same advice I go on describing the National Health Plan and now we hear lots of talk from the opponents of the National Healthcare Bill as to how much money it's going to cost. With nobody saying okay there is a big health piece and which actually saves you billions of dollars. Look we all agree the health scenario in the United States right now is disorganized. It's very expensive. It's leaving people totally out of the circle of care. I mean it's a mess it's the best way to describe it. And to go ahead and straighten that mess out is not going to be an easy task. But public health is one area I think that even in putting the bill together republicans and democrats had no argument over the public health section. And what really made me mad as a matter of fact down in Washington was in the old days you could agree or disagree on different aspects of legislation. But nobody said "no" to the entire concept and that in effect is what happened in this past year.

Margaret Flinter: Governor, I am glad you raised the public health component of the Health Reform Bill. We were of course very happy to see the prevention in public health fund included with the intention to provide financial support for prevention in public health programs, I think \$15 billion over the next 10 years. I have been interested to see that a significant portion of the fund right now is being allocated to healthcare workforce issues especially primary care workforce development we all recognize how important that is but are you concerned that this will take money away that was intended for the public health programs?

Lowell Weicker: No, you know there is obviously going to be a jockeying back and forth as we as the whole country operates within very narrow financial parameters but if I can only get the public to see that what's being done in the overall is going to benefit each of us then I am happy with the situation now look, what bothers me and I got a specific example I can say to illustrate my point. If

you ask the 50 states what are you doing with the tobacco settlement money, I bet you, you are going to get a variety of answers none of which have to do with tobacco cessation of smoking. I use that money to fund about everything else in the budget including right here in Connecticut.

Margaret Flinter: Right.

Lowell Weicker: And that's outrageous, that money was specifically met to go ahead and bring it in to smoking in this country which is one of the major causes of death and certainly there is no excuse for not following the mandate that was imposed. Well that's the only thing that bothers me in terms of the various component part of the health bill, people are going to start to use the money for their own purposes rather than the purpose rather than the purpose of the design in Washington.

Mark Masselli: Today we are speaking with Lowell Weicker – President of Trust for America's Health. Governor last year swine flu epidemic gave us all our front row seated scene what a major epidemic would do and the strains on resources that it could create and although it turned out to be less devastating than the initial predictions were, it was certainly a wakeup call to look at our public health preparedness. Do you think that country is ready for another threat like this one and how is the Trust involved in helping states prepare?

Lowell Weicker: Of course our spirit, it worries me. The only reason I am chucking is my number one aid that's Trust for America's Health who now has moved on to the FDA a lady by the name Kim Elliot. Kim was assigned the duty of the swine flu epidemic, and she threw her heart and soul into that. And like many people we tried to make it so that we were truly prepared for what everyone believed what's going to be a pandemic. Well as it turned out, that didn't happen and what worries me now as the next time we say there is going to be even nobody is going to believe us. Believe me these things happen and you know the things that belong to nature and to God are not things that we can go ahead and dictate within our human population, so yes I think the states by virtue of the preparedness lessons of the swine flu are better prepared today and will be for a few years but if nothing happens I think that will probably fade from their memory whereas it is a very real possibility. And you have to point out that we live in a global society more so than ever so that what happens in the middle of Africa can all of a sudden no matter in 48 hours happen in the middle of United States. The interaction, you know, being as rapid and as numerous as they are, so hopefully the country learned something even though the epidemic was not as severe but hopefully those lessons will last for a while before that fade from the memory.

Margaret Flinter: Governor Weicker, we do live in a global world and culture and when you look around this country and the world, what do you see in terms of innovation and who should our listeners at Conversations be keeping an eye on?

Lowell Weicker: I think the United States, let me say on thing of my chest. I think the United States can play a far greater role in the world than it does in terms of disease prevention and healthcare etc. You know we have always excelled at the business or life that's been the United States. Up until very recently when all of a sudden we were very much involved in the **business of death 20:25** vis-à-vis the various wars that were waging. I mean an example and I don't know the exact statistics but I heard just myself on I think public radio the other day, we have no vaccine for malaria we all agree, fair.

Margaret Flinter: Yeah.

Lowell Weicker: And yet it only costs a few million dollars to supply the main ingredient against malaria which is mosquito netting and we ought to be able to distribute that to every men, women and child in the world and we are talking millions, we are not talking billions, it's very inexpensive but it is the only thing we have at hand. You know I remember when I got into a huge debate here in United States with the far right over the matter of AIDS and specific to that expect of it which called for sex education and this was before we had the various cocktails but we still don't have the vaccine. The various matters that could go ahead and ameliorate the disease and Jesse Helms and others refuse to listen to the matter of sex education. I said listen I said if you don't do this it's the only tool we have at hand to prevent AIDS because once you got it you are dead. Now, that's not the case today which sure it was in the 80s and what I am trying to say you is that we can play a significant role with not so much money in terms of saving life around the world if we apply ourselves to that instead of we have chosen to spend trillions on war and we are not very admired for it at the same time many of our philosophical opponents in the world are sending medical teams and medical assistants around the world. We do it better than anybody else but we are not doing it to the extent that we should.

Mark Masselli: Today we have been speaking with Lowell Weicker, former US Senator and Governor of Connecticut and current President of Trust for America's Health. Governor, thank you so much for joining us today.

Lowell Weicker: Yes, great to be with both of you.

Mark Masselli: Each week, Conversations highlights a bright idea about how to make wellness a part of our communities into everyday lives. This week's bright idea focuses on a program specifically targeting kids and teens in California called Rethink Your Drink. Many people don't realize just how many calories beverages can contribute to their daily intake especially when it comes to excess sugar. The single biggest dietary source of added sugar is sugar re-drinks in one regular 20 ounce can of soda there are nearly 17 tea spoons of sugar. Daily consumption of these sweet and beverages dramatically increases a child's risk for being overweight or obese later in life, which can lead to Type-2 Diabetes and

Heart Disease. At this summer all YMCA summer programs in the Gold Coast California region will be learning about that Rethink Your Drink Program and both parents and kids will be invited to participate in an eight-week summer challenge. In addition to the final prizes, everyone will receive a poster and a water bottle to help them make healthy or beverage choices such as water or a 100% fruit juices. It's part a campaign by the San Luis Obispo Public Health Department aimed to bring attention to the sugary content of soda and other popular sugar sweetened drinks, teach proper nutrition labeling and offer insights into healthier drink substitutes. In order to reach as many people as possible the campaign offers free training, presentations and educational material to local organizations, schools and programs. Different counties in the region are conducting their own Rethink Your Drink launches this summer and hopefully other public health departments around the country will eventually follow through teaching kids to reach for a cold glass of water this summer instead of a sugary beverage and to keep that habit up in definitely now that's a bright idea.

Margaret Flinter: This is Conversations on Healthcare. I am Margaret Flinter.

Mark Masselli: And I am Mark Masselli, peace and health.

Margaret Flinter: Conversations on Healthcare, broadcast from the Campus of Wesleyan University at WESU streaming live at Wesufm.org and brought to you by the Community Health Center.