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Business leaders debate health bill

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VINELAND -- The local business community tackled the debate on the future of American health care over lunch Thursday.

The Greater Vineland Chamber of Commerce's monthly luncheon included a four-person panel discussing the federal health care reform bill Congress is currently debating.

The panel agreed the existing system is broken, but questioned the realistic need and cost of a new plan.

"There could be something done. There should be something done, but to overhaul one-sixth of the gross domestic product just because it's politically attractive doesn't mean it's worth doing," said panelist Aaron M. Katzoff, vice president of the benefits division for Bollinger Insurance.

But panelist Sharon Schulman, executive director of William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Richard Stockton College, listed the issues and misconceptions of the current system.

"The myth is we have the best health care system in the world, and we don't," she said.

Schulman said this country spends twice as much per capita as England on health care, but still has higher rates of diseases like cancer and diabetes.

Statewide, she added, health care costs have spiked 95 percent in two years for the average family while their wages rose only 30 percent.

Katzoff asked how much costs would increase for individuals under a new plan, and how that might affect taxes.

Attorney Wayne Triantos of Triantos and Delp shared the same fear as he listened from the audience.

"I'm just concerned with the cost and how they're going to finance it because I think the tax burden is already way too high," he said.

The two other panelists weren't just worried about the overall cost, but also want to know how businesses will be financially affected.

John A. DiAngelo, senior vice president for finance and the chief financial officer for South Jersey Healthcare, said hospitals need a way to make money to survive and there are initiatives in the reform bill that could have hospitals paying more than they have.

He said he's heard a lot of ideas, but hasn't seen anything come out about protecting hospitals.

"We're interested to see where the theoretical discussions will move into reality," DiAngelo said.

Richard Hasenauer, vice president and director of human resources for Gerresheimer Glass, said a business needs healthy employees and a way to keep employees healthy.

But he said he doesn't want to see hospitals losing money because it would have a trickle down effect on the businesses like Gerresheimer that make medical and lab glass.

Hasenauer encouraged everyone in the room to take action and express their own opinions on the bill.

"I don't think we should sit on our hands and wait until the politicians decide," he said.

Hasenauer told the business owners in attendance Thursday to read the plan and formulate their own opinions or ideas.

"There's just no excuse for not putting in your voice," he said.
