



230 East Ohio Street Suite 500
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www.himss.org

September 25, 2008

The Honorable Fortney H. Stark
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Ways and
Means Health Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Dave Camp
Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Ways and
Means Health Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Stark and Ranking Member Camp,

The Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS) applauds your leadership on healthcare information technology (IT) issues. HIMSS is the healthcare industry's membership organization exclusively focused on providing global leadership for the optimal use of healthcare IT and management systems for the betterment of healthcare. HIMSS has over 20,000 individual, 350 corporate, healthcare providers, and affiliate members, plus 46 chapters around the United States that frame and lead healthcare public policy and industry practices through its policy research and educational and professional development initiatives designed to promote information and management systems' contributions to ensuring safe, quality, and cost-effective patient care.

Via this letter, we share our thoughts on your newly introduced "Health-e Information Technology Act of 2008". HIMSS supports many aspects of this legislation, such as:

- Codification of the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC);
- Support for the nationwide electronic exchange of health information;
- Development of a federal strategic plan for healthcare IT;
- Financial incentives for healthcare providers to adopt and use healthcare IT; and the
- Promotion of measures to protect the confidentiality, integrity and availability of personal health information.

However, HIMSS believes the legislation has negative consequences, including discounting the current efforts of "AHIC 2.0" and the development of an open source "health information technology system" by the federal government. Specifically, HIMSS has concerns with the following provisions in this legislation:

1. Establishment of an "HIT Advisory Committee" to advise the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology: The legislation establishes a "HIT Advisory Committee" of public and private stakeholders to provide input and assistance to the National Coordinator and serve as a forum for input and expertise in the area of healthcare IT. The "HIT Advisory Committee" serves as a Federal Advisory Committee, governed by the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA).

Establishment of a "HIT Advisory Committee" would dismantle the work that the federal government and private sector have already achieved in transitioning the federal healthcare IT advisory committee, the American Health Information Community (AHIC), into the private sector. This work includes guidance for the standards harmonization efforts of the Healthcare Information Technology Standards Panel (HITSP), which has developed interoperability standards recognized by HHS Secretary Leavitt for national adoption. Since its inception in 2005, the intent of AHIC has been to transition to the private sector. For over a year, efforts have been well underway to carry out this goal, and on September 23, 2008, members were announced for the "AHIC 2.0" Board of Directors.



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2. Development of an open-source “health information technology system” through the auspices of the ONC: The legislation directs the National Coordinator to provide for coordinating the development, routine updating, and provision of an open source “health information technology system” that is either new or based on an open source health information technology system, such as open source VistA. The system is to be made available to providers for a nominal fee.

The private sector makes significant investments in research and development for healthcare IT products. Healthcare IT is available via a competitive market in which vendors compete on the basis of price, quality, and functionality of a product. The development, routine updating, and provision of an open source “healthcare information system” is not the role of the federal government and such product development should remain in the private sector.

In conclusion, HIMSS believes that with some modifications to your legislation, we can find common ground on final healthcare IT legislation that meets stakeholders’ goals. Please do not hesitate to contact our Director for Congressional Affairs, Meredith Taylor, at 703-562-8847, for any support on this topic. We look forward to working with you to reconcile a final bill that will help in the transformation of healthcare for all Americans. Thank you again for your leadership and dedication on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

H. Stephen Lieber, CAE
President & CEO

Charles E. Christian, FHIMSS, FCHIME
HIMSS Chairman of the Board
Director of IS & CIO
Good Samaritan Hospital