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## **2 on LSU board replaced**

**The Advocate | 07.02.08**

Capitol News Bureau

Longtime LSU Board of Supervisors member Charles Weems is one of two on the board replaced Tuesday night by Gov. Bobby Jindal.

Weems, an Alexandria lawyer who was appointed in 1991, is well known as a friend of LSU athletics. He was the current longest-serving member on the board.

Jindal's replacements are R. Blake Chatelain, an Alexandria bank president, and James Moore, a Monroe oilman.

Chatelain and Moore were maximum Jindal campaign contributors, each giving at least \$5,000.

Moore, who is not an LSU graduate, replaces Monroe banker Hal Hinchliffe, who had served two years on the board after completing an unexpired term.

LSU board Chairman Jerry Shea of New Iberia said the backgrounds of Chatelain and Moore indicate they should be strong board members, although he does not know them personally.

Shea said he is a "little bit" surprised Weems was not reappointed.

"It's going to be a loss for the board because he's the most experienced member we've had," Shea said.

Weems said he respected the governor's purgative to choose board members. "I'm disappointed only that I didn't get to talk to the governor," he said.

Chatelain served on Jindal's Health Care Transition Advisory Council while Moore was on Jindal's Ethics Transition Advisory Council.

Chatelain, an LSU graduate, is the president and chief executive officer of Red River Bank. He is the vice chairman of the Cenla Advantage Partnership, a regional economic development group.

Moore, a Northeast Louisiana University graduate, is the former president and owner of Moore Oil Co.

He is an owner and developer of Marriott and Hilton hotels. Moore previously served as chairman of the Monroe Chamber of Commerce.

<http://www.theadvocate.com/news/22799089.html>

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**Gambit Weekly | 07.01.08**  
**Clancy DuBos**

Dear Mr. Mayor

A group of Lower Mid-City residents and business owners has written an "open letter" to Mayor Ray Nagin and City Council members demanding a voice in the decision-making process relating to property acquisitions for the LSU-VA Hospital. The hospital, which Bobby Jindal's Administration recently approved at 424 beds, is slated to occupy some 37 acres between Canal Street and Tulane Avenue, from South Claiborne Avenue to South Rocheblave Street. The city and state have partnered to acquire private properties in the area, by expropriation if necessary, and the land assembly will include demolition of scores of old homes and some local landmarks.

"Our historic neighborhood has been designated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as one of the 11 Most Endangered Historic Sites in the U.S. today," the letter states. Citing documents that Nagin executed as authorizing "the wholesale bulldozing and destruction of our neighborhood" and alleging that one of the agreements expired in April, the residents and business owners demand a "full and open debate in a public forum with our elected officials" before any agreement is renewed. The alleged failure to have such an open debate is "unconscionable," the property owners claim, adding that they support the development of "a comprehensive, quality health care delivery system for our residents and veterans" — somewhere else.

The letter also poses a series of questions, including why the old Charity and VA buildings were not brought back after Katrina, and why the "preferred" site for the new LSU-VA complex is a historic neighborhood. "We are asking our elected city officials to re-affirm and put into practice their stated support for open, accountable and transparent government," the letter concludes.

As of press time, Gambit Weekly had not heard back from Nagin's office after requesting comment on the letter.

[http://www.bestofneworleans.com/dispatch/2008-07-01/news\\_scut.php](http://www.bestofneworleans.com/dispatch/2008-07-01/news_scut.php)

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**Group awards LSU N.O. department \$110,000 for blindness research  
New Orleans CityBusiness | 07.02.08**

NEW ORLEANS - Research to Prevent Blindness has awarded Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center's Department of Ophthalmology a \$110,000 grant to support research into the causes, treatment and prevention of blinding diseases, LSUHSCNO said today.

Donald R. Bergsma, ophthalmology chairman and director of the LSU Eye Center of Excellence, will direct the research.

Areas of research the grant will support include the development of nanoscale tear film analytical techniques, multispectral imaging to screen patients for diabetic retinopathy, using artificial intelligence to identify eye abnormalities and the development of novel chemotherapy for ocular herpes virus.

To date, RPB has awarded grants totaling more than \$2 million to LSUHSCNO.

"This continued, annual support is an affirmation of the outstanding quality of research being conducted by our team," Bergsma said.

<http://www.neworleanscitybusiness.com/uptotheminute.cfm?recid=18301>

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**Is this the most powerful person at LSU?****Baton Rouge Business Report | 07.02.08**

By Steve Clark

## LAMONICA FILE

Birth date: June 19, 1944

Birthplace: Baton Rouge

Education: Bachelor's [government], LSU, 1966; master's [government], LSU, 1967; juris doctor [LSU, 1970]

Significant court appointments: Special master, reapportionment case [St. Helena Parish]; trustee and co-counsel to trustee, complex bankruptcy [Middle District]; special master, reinsurance rehabilitation [19th Judicial District]; special master, construction litigation [19th Judicial District]; panelist, 1995 judicial conference of U.S. Fifth Judicial Circuit

Ray Lamonica scoffs at the notion, as some people believe, that he's the most powerful person at LSU.

"It's laughable," he says. "If I have any authority, it emanates from the board's and the president's commitment to follow the law, to follow the bylaws, to try to improve the bylaws and to develop policies to have an appropriately, orderly and diligently run organization."

Lamonica undoubtedly has a degree of sway over policy in his role as general counsel—a position that didn't exist within the system until Lamonica stepped into it. But it might be a stretch to say he's calling the shots, given the powerful presence of LSU System President John Lombardi, who was hired last summer from the University of Massachusetts. Lombardi is not known for his reticence or an inclination to defer decision-making to others when he has an opinion of his own.

Still, given Lamonica's character traits and work habits as detailed by those who know him well, any power vacuum at the system office likely wouldn't remain a vacuum for long. Lamonica—who as U.S. attorney during the 1980s and '90s and made a name for himself as a tenacious prosecutor of white-collar crime and public corruption—plays a role implementing those policies and bylaws and that's it, he says.

But it's a pretty big role. Winston Day, a former chancellor of LSU's Paul M. Hebert Law Center who's known Lamonica for decades, says it's not accurate to think of Lamonica as the power-broker.

"The proper way to say it is Ray sits at the right hand of, and has the ear of, the most powerful man in the LSU System," Day says. "That's a new phenomenon. Here's how I would describe it: Lombardi for the first time is the most powerful man in the LSU System since LSU became a system."

Equal-opportunity prosecutor

The system began asserting itself under former President Bill Jenkins, Day says, with the trend accelerating under Lombardi and with Lamonica in the middle of everything. So what manner of man is this Lamonica?

As U.S. attorney for the Middle District of Louisiana during the savings and loan meltdown of the 1980s and 1990s—which in the end wound up costing taxpayers around \$160 billion—Lamonica was an equal-opportunity prosecutor. The savings and loan crisis turned up all kinds of slimy conduct on the part of financial executives. Those were the most complex cases to prosecute, though it didn't matter to Lamonica.

"Here's my basic philosophy: equal justice under law," he says. "You don't use the U.S. attorney's office to beat up on bank tellers. It is unjust to only hit the weakest the hardest and not deal with the rich and the powerful."

Brad Myers, an LSU law graduate and attorney with Kean Miller who served as assistant U.S. attorney under Lamonica for about a year in the late 1980s, says he had a good relationship with his former boss, even though Lamonica was “a taskmaster.”

“He was demanding, just like any successful lawyer,” Myers says. “He demanded that you work hard and that you were a careful lawyer and that you considered all angles of any issue, and he wanted you to be prepared.

“Some people just don’t deal well with that kind of pressure, I guess. I found him to be very fair. I will tell you he is a black-and-white-type of person. There is the right answer, and there is the wrong answer. There’s no gray in between with him. I think that’s where some people have difficulty dealing with him.”

Lamonica says building a solid case involving complex business transactions, a case that won’t be overturned on appeal, is difficult because the truth is so hard to get—though necessary if a case is to be tried fairly and ethically. Myers says Lamonica’s attention to detail in building federal cases may have him a touch too hands-on for some of the people working for him.

“He’s a very detail-oriented person,” Myers says. “Very hands on. Ray wanted to know everything. Depending on your ability to deal with somebody like that, some people didn’t like that. My theory was he was the boss so he could do whatever he wanted. If he told me to carry his briefcase, I would carry his briefcase.”

Myers, who admits he steered clear of Lamonica’s classes while at LSU because of their grueling reputation, says the traits Lamonica displayed as U.S. attorney and his sharp legal mind probably make him a very effective legal adviser for LSU.

“They have [a general counsel] who is very smart,” Myers says. “They have one who will zealously represent his client. He is going to protect the interests of LSU to his best ability and to the utmost.”

He says the system’s move to rein in its campuses is in keeping with what he saw of Lamonica’s management style in the U.S. attorney’s office.

“It’s certainly consistent with my description of him as being a hands-on administrator and wanting to know the details and having a clear vision of what’s right and what’s wrong—not that anybody’s doing anything wrong,” Myers says. But what’s the mission of the university and sticking to that, as opposed to straying from that. If that’s what Lombardi wants, Ray is a perfect fit to accomplish that mission.”

Lamonica, who also served as counsel to former Gov. Dave Treen, was teaching law at LSU when former board chairman Bernie Boudreaux asked him to look over a couple of legal matters. The workload grew to a part-time job. Lamonica finally had to give up his teaching load and become a full-time, in-house legal adviser.

“I admit I was wrong in believing at one point that [the system] didn’t need a general counsel,” Lamonica says.

Now that he’s there, Lamonica is working as vigorously to protect the interests of the system as he once did pursuing crooked bank executives and public servants.

### A system evolves

Lamonica is at the heart of what he calls an evolutionary stage in LSU System history, moving in the direction of more central oversight by the system office of LSU's various campuses. In the past, it was easy for chancellors of those campuses to ram deals through the board without, in Lamonica's view, proper scrutiny.

After a report from the Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities [AGB] that found a lack of oversight of the LSU System office over its component campuses, Lamonica crafted amendments to system bylaws that, among other things, required system approval of any project costing \$100,000 or more.

The system also set up a central audit committee. In the past, auditors at individual campuses answered to individual chancellors. Now all auditing runs through the system board's audit committee. Former chancellor Sean O'Keefe lost some of his political capital arguing—unsuccessfully—that LSU A&M's auditor should answer only to him, not the system.

"An audit committee is incredibly important because that's where board members get to see all our warts and address them," Lamonica says. "We have them. There's no doubt about it. You deal with fraud, abuse, waste and incompetence in an audit committee."

Also, certain intellectual property and personnel decisions have to run through the system office. That will change—such duties will be delegated back to individual campuses—once standards are in place, Lamonica says. And while to campus chancellors the whole thing may seem like a power grab by the central office, Lamonica insists it's just good business sense.

"There was the notion that the branch office ought not to be controlled by the central office basically," he says. "No business person would say anything like that."

The AGB report noted that the "traditional freedom of LSU campuses to do as they please" created a pattern of management and conduct that weren't always in line with "highly policy-oriented and strategic authority" on the system level. Lamonica says the bylaw changes are meant to transform what has been a loose federation of campuses into a "more tightly formed, efficient and effective system."

A lot of it is making sure public-private partnership between campuses and outside organizations furthers the fundamental academic and research missions of the university and not detracts from them. If a deal between a campus and outside entity ends up not working to the university's advantage as advertised, it's not the campus that's responsible, Lamonica says. It's the system's responsibility. That's why chancellors now have to present major proposals—erecting a museum through a public-private partnership, for instance—to the board for scrutiny to make sure it's a good deal for the university. A co-generation plant agreement LSU entered into with a private entity during Mark Emmert's administration is an example of a deal that hasn't worked out as well as advertised. The co-gen project is the subject of major litigation Lamonica is handling.

"We believe we are not getting what we bargained for, and that is saving money on electricity," he says. "We believe the electricity is costing us more, and so we've challenged the whole foundation of the contract."

The University of New Orleans' Ogden Museum is another public-private undertaking that might not have been allowed to proceed if made the focus of due diligence on the system level. As it was, a commitment was made before any agreement about how the museum would be run and who would control it. As a result, money was diverted from the academic mission, Lamonica says.

"What we're trying to do is make sure that before you make a commitment to that sort of thing, you review the details," he says. "You don't make the commitment and then try to make it work."

Even the Shaw Center for the Arts, another public-private project launched during Emmert's tenure—would have come under much more scrutiny had the new order been in place then, Lamonica says.

"It would require a lot more detail," he says. "We have a lot of entities involved in the Shaw Center, which are essentially shell entities with no assets—with responsibilities, but without assets. I'm not saying we wouldn't have had a Shaw Center; I think it just would have been structured more carefully."

### Back to the basics

This tightening of control at the central office has earned Lamonica and others at the system level the tag of micromanager, though he takes issue with that characterization. It's not micromanagement, Lamonica says. It's basic management.

"We should not be managing campuses," he says. "We should be in a role to make sure campuses are appropriately managed. They're not held accountable. They're not responsible. The only entity that's responsible for all these debts and all these obligations as a legal entity is the board of supervisors. I am sure some would like it to just be rubber-stamped, like it has been in the past."

Hank Gowan, who's known Lamonica since their student days at the LSU law school in the late 1960s, has been chairman of the board's audit committee for the past two years. Lamonica is influential within the system, Gowan says, "because he's earned it."

"When it comes to lawyers, I'm very, very critical of lawyers," Gowan says. "I happen to be one myself. Ray is as good a lawyer as I know about. Competent. I can't say enough good things about Ray. If I were the president of the LSU System, I'd want Ray Lamonica."

That's despite their disagreements. Gowan was a vocal critic of the way O'Keefe's departure from LSU was engineered. It turned into a messy spectacle when word leaked of O'Keefe's impending exit, which angered some prominent LSU donors who staged a public protest.

System officials initially refused to shed any light on the back story to O'Keefe's departure, though public pressure finally convinced Lamonica to release a partial list of items from the former chancellor's employee evaluation that might or might not have had anything to do with O'Keefe leaving the university.

Lamonica says there are good reasons O'Keefe is no longer chancellor. Gowan didn't buy the rationale put forward at the time and still isn't happy about how things went down. An audit that was reported to be pending into O'Keefe's dealings with the Forever LSU fundraising campaign never took place, Gowan says. None of this colors Gowan's opinion of Lamonica, however.

"Ray has a job to do, and his client is the LSU System," he says. "As far as doing that job, he does it very well. I may not like some of his decisions. I may disagree with them, but he does a good job for the LSU System."

Gowan says he sees "very little politics" or partisanship creep into Lamonica's decision-making. To be a good general counsel for such a sprawling organization as the LSU System is a very tough balancing act, Gowan says. Although surrounded by people within the system who all have their own interests and agendas, whatever Lamonica does has to be in the interests of the institution itself, not the people.

"Until you work with him or someone like him in that position, it's really difficult to grasp," Gowan says. "This person has got to have this overall view of the LSU System and not how it affects one person."

John George, a Shreveport physician LSU board member, says Lamonica does an outstanding job getting the system the best leverage possible in any legal matter. At the same time, that the system encompasses a \$3 billion-a-year higher ed system and statewide health care system means there's more legal work than one person can do, factoring in personnel issues, litigation, defense and health care law. Ideally, the system will hire more staff to handle the loan, with Lamonica acting more as a manager, George says. As for how large a shadow Lamonica casts over system policy, George says it's a function of how much influence the board defers to him. Lamonica provides the leverage. It's up to the board to decide what to do with it.

"If some people think there's too much leeway given to the legal office, it's because the board leadership allows it," George says. "Given the resources and manpower he's got, Ray's doing a fantastic job and it's up to board leadership to make these decisions. If there's criticism, it's got to be pointed at the board. He's staff."

<http://www.businessreport.com/news/2008/jul/01/most-powerful-person-lsu-edn1/>

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## **Protesters picket as Boustany pushes LaCHIP enrollment**

**Daily World | 07.02.08**

By Alexandria Burris

A small group of protesters picketed U.S. Rep. Charles Boustany's visit to Opelousas Tuesday, where he encouraged parents to enroll their child in the Louisiana Children's Health Insurance Program.

The insurance program, known as LaCHIP, makes health care available at little or no cost to uninsured children.

About 5.4 percent of children are uninsured, according to the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospital statistics. More than 118,000 Louisiana children are enrolled.

The U.S. Congress recently expanded the program to the LaCHIP Affordable Plan, which covers children of whose families earn too much to qualify for the regular LaCHIP program.

In January, Boustany, R-Lafayette, voted against a bill that re-authorized and set aside \$100 million for outreach and enrollment efforts through 2012 leading critics to call his efforts "hypocritical."

James Semien said he did not believe that Boustany's efforts to encourage parents to sign up their children for the program was sincere.

"This is an election year and all of a sudden he wants to sign up children for LaCHIP," Semien said on Tuesday.

Semien and three women stood outside of the Opelousas Housing Authority, where Boustany touted the program to the city's residents and local officials.

Boustany said the protesters had the wrong information, saying he voted to provide \$5 billion more for the state children's health insurance program.

"I'm proud to support LaCHIP," he said. "It's a growing program."

President George Bush vetoed a measure last year that proposed increasing \$35 billion for SCHIP, saying that he would not approve a proposal more than \$5 billion because states such as Louisiana have to do a better job enrolling children. Boustany supported the veto.

The veto stopped Louisiana from expanding LaCHIP's income limit from 200 percent of the poverty limit to 300 percent.

Boustany said states have not done a good job at enrolling uninsured children in the program.

More needed to be done to educate parents on the program, he said. Health care providers must also make services more accessible.

The congressman is visiting cities throughout his district to discuss the new LaCHIP program and to register children for insurance.

He kicked off his tour in Lafayette last month.

The children's health insurance program is a partnership between the state and federal government.

"I'm encouraging family to take advantage of this program, to seek out information," Boustany said.

The mostly silent protesters held signs reading, "Boustany voted against Child's Health Insurance extension," and "Our children needed your vote."

Under the traditional program, a family's income cannot exceed 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

In St. Landry Parish, 3,212 children were enrolled in the program as of February, according to the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospital's statistics.

Under the LaCHIP Affordable Plan, children up to age 19 are covered. A family can have a maximum income of \$53,000 for a family of four, increasing exponentially as the amount of children grows.

Families must pay a \$50 per month premium, a \$200 deductible for mental health and make co-payments for medical visits.

Semien said he and his group are not criticizing the state's children's health insurance program nor are they campaigning in favor of Boustany's opposition in the upcoming election.

"We're not just going to come in here and do anything political for that matter and think we're gullible," he said.

<http://www.dailyworld.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080702/NEWS01/807020303/1002>

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## **CMS needs to improve oversight of supplemental payment programs**

### **Healthcare Finance News | 07.02.08**

By Fred Bazzoli, Editor

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services needs to do a better job monitoring the billions of dollars it provides in supplemental payments through the Medicaid program, according to a recent report from the Government Accountability Office.

CMS needs to expedite efforts to issue a final rule implementing additional reporting requirements for disproportionate share hospitals, the GAO found.

In addition, it needs to better track and review states' supplemental payment programs.

The report found that CMS lacks information on several aspects of the supplemental payment program, particularly as it relates to disproportionate share hospitals, which are safety net hospitals that treat large numbers of Medicaid and uninsured patients.

Medicaid is a long-standing program jointly funded by federal and state governments. In addition to standard Medicaid payments, many states make supplemental payments to certain providers, which are matched by federal funds. States made at least \$23 billion in supplemental payments in fiscal year 2006; of that, \$17.1 billion was designated for disproportionate share hospitals.

The program has been controversial from many perspectives, facing charges that it is ineffective at funneling funds to financially vulnerable hospitals and that it lacks checks and balances that would enable effective oversight. The program previously was scrutinized by the GAO in 2004.

The latest GAO report found that states made \$6.3 billion in non-DSH payments to hospitals, but information on those payments was incomplete. The GAO said it could not ascertain the exact amount and distribution of fiscal year 2006 non-DSH payments because states did not report all their payments to the CMS.

CMS officials told the GAO that the agency is updating reporting requirements to collect better information on supplemental payments and that it's finalizing a rule proposed in 2005 that requires states to report more detailed information on DSH payments. It's also seeking improvements in the reporting of other non-DSH payments.

As of April 2008, CMS officials did not have plans to require that states report all non-DSH payments on a facility-specific basis.

In its most recent report, a GAO survey found that California, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York and Texas made \$12.3 billion in Medicaid supplemental payments in fiscal 2006. The five states made payments through a total of 48 supplemental payment programs that paid hospitals, nursing facilities or other providers.

In each of the five states, supplemental payments were concentrated on a small proportion of providers, with 5 percent of payments coming from 53 percent to 71 percent of all supplemental payments.

<http://www.healthcarefinancenews.com/story.cms?id=8270>

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## **Kennedy leads renewed effort on universal healthcare**

**The Boston Globe | 07.02.08**

By Lisa Wangsness, Globe Staff

Senator Edward M. Kennedy's office has begun convening a series of meetings involving a wide array of healthcare specialists to begin laying the groundwork for a new attempt to provide universal healthcare, according to participants.

The discussions signal that Kennedy, who instructed aides to begin holding the meetings while he is in Massachusetts undergoing treatment for brain cancer, intends to work vigorously to build bipartisan support for a major healthcare initiative when he returns to Washington in the fall.

Those involved in the discussions said Kennedy believes it is extremely important to move as quickly as possible on overhauling the healthcare system after the next president takes office in January in order to capitalize on the momentum behind a new administration.

Kennedy was an early endorser of Senator Barack Obama, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee who is also a member of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, which Kennedy chairs.

Obama's Senate staff has attended the roundtable discussions. If Obama is elected, Kennedy's effort to identify points of agreement among senators could smooth the way for the new administration to press ahead on universal healthcare, which Obama has promised to implement within four years.

The last time a national healthcare plan was attempted, under President Clinton in 1993, the presidential panel charged with devising a proposal was widely criticized for not consulting enough with Congress, and protracted disagreements erupted, delaying its progress for months and ultimately resulting in its demise. Kennedy's effort appears to be designed to identify areas of common ground between Democrats and Republicans, business and labor, providers and insurers, and others before the new president takes office.

"The senator is trying to learn from health reform attempts in the past and to build a fair amount of consensus among his Senate colleagues, House colleagues, and the Obama campaign . . . and find a strategy that could carry with some momentum into the new administration," said Dr. Jay Himmelstein, a health policy specialist at University of Massachusetts Medical School and a former Kennedy staff member who has been involved in the talks.

The initiative also suggests that Kennedy, who has made healthcare his signature issue in his 45-year Senate career and who is fighting an aggressive brain tumor, is considering his legacy as a new administration arrives in Washington - a moment many see as the best chance for widespread changes in the healthcare system in 15 years.

"You have got to think this will be the Ted Kennedy Health Reform Act, because he's a beloved figure and he's championed the issue for so long," said John Rother, policy director for the AARP, which has been involved in the discussions. "There are a lot of unknowns right now, but what we do know obviously is he is very close to Obama, and he also has quite a network of health policy experts that he can draw from."

Melissa Wagoner, spokeswoman for Kennedy, added that "Making sure each American has access to quality, affordable healthcare is the cause of Senator Kennedy's life."

Kennedy played a critical role in helping Massachusetts create a healthcare overhaul proposal in 2006 by aiding the state in obtaining the federal money needed to subsidize it. It appears he is now looking to Massachusetts to help shape the debate in Washington. Earlier this year, Kennedy recruited John McDonough, executive director of Health Care For All in Boston and a major player in the Massachusetts healthcare overhaul debate, to lead the new health initiative.

Aides to Kennedy have also assembled a network of Massachusetts advisers, including healthcare lawyers, economists, nonprofit leaders, doctors, and health insurers who may be asked to work on specific aspects of a national plan. At a recent meeting in Boston, the group discussed how different elements of the Massachusetts approach might work on a national level.

Rob Restuccia, executive director of the national healthcare advocacy group Community Catalyst and one of those who attended, said the group considered questions such as whether the Massachusetts Health Connector, the quasi-public entity that helps uninsured people obtain coverage, might be structured on a national level.

"I believe we will have a great story to tell about how national health reform can learn from what we've done in Massachusetts," said Jarrett Barrios, president of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation, who also attended one of the meetings.

Kennedy is not alone in trying to get a head start on the healthcare debate. Senator Max Baucus, a Democrat from Montana and chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, held a healthcare summit in mid-June, and a bipartisan proposal to make private insurance accessible to all Americans has been put forward by Senator Ron Wyden, a Democrat from Oregon, and Robert Bennett, a Republican from Utah.

Intraparty disputes were one reason Clinton's 1993 proposal foundered. Back then, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the Democratic chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, dismissed the financing of Clinton's plan as "fantasy" just before the president presented it to Congress.

Ron Pollack, executive director of Families USA, a healthcare consumer advocacy group, said Kennedy was trying to avoid division by having senior staff members meet with their counterparts on Baucus's committee.

"If the two committees are working cooperatively together and developing a common legislative proposal, it means that the process is less likely to get bogged down because of jurisdictional and substantive differences," he said.

Even though health costs have soared along with the number of uninsured over the past 15 years, the defeat of the Clinton health overhaul plan was so politically devastating to the administration and to efforts to enact universal health insurance law that nothing approaching such a large-scale effort has been tried since. One purpose of the roundtable discussions, participants said, is to educate Senate staff on broad issues that have not been seriously debated in years.

Kennedy's committee has held two meetings so far - one with healthcare coalitions, the other with physicians' groups. Eight more will be held by the end of the month. The meetings are attended by aides for committee members of both parties, said Craig Orfield, a spokesman for Senator Mike Enzi of Wyoming, the ranking Republican on the committee.

Whether the two parties and myriad interest groups can overcome their differences over the next year remains to be seen, but several of those participating in the discussions expressed optimism about that possibility.

"There's been talk about the healthcare crisis for years, but I think in the last year and a half, the system is failing so many people and becoming so costly, that I don't think there's anybody who doesn't understand there's got to be fundamental changes to the system," Orfield said.

<http://www.healthcarefinancenews.com/?tab=4>

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