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Dr. Cyril Spiro, founder of M.D. Web Solutions / The AMCIS Network

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### Courtney touts stimulus help to health industry

By JAMES MOSHER

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Norwich, Conn. — Second District U.S. Representative Joe Courtney faced several questions Thursday about whether the recently signed "economic stimulus" law would bolster struggling nursing homes. "That's something that's decided in Hartford," Courtney said, responding to concerns about the possible closing of the Griswold Healthcare & Rehabilitation Center, that town's only nursing home. Courtney told an overflow crowd at Otis Library that the federal government allocated another \$1.3 billion in Medicaid assistance to Connecticut over two years, but nursing-home reimbursements are handled by state government.

"If we got into every little policy area, we would have never gotten this bill through Congress," he said, referring to the \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act signed Tuesday by President Barack Obama.

Leading a panel of health care professionals, Courtney continued his support for the legislation.

"This will provide a jolt of job creation and be a long-term benefit to our country," he said.

How the stimulus will speed the adoption of electronic medical records was the main topic addressed by panelists. Among the benefits will be more rapid results and lower costs, some said.

"We need to come into the 20th and 21st century in our use of medical records," said Jill Zorn, program officer at The Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut Inc.

Existing systems carry "tremendous waste" and are "highly inefficient," said Dr. Cyril Spiro, founder of M.D. Web Solutions, an information technology company.

"Doctors need to have the right information at the right time, that's the key," he said.

About \$19 billion is allocated for medical IT, Courtney said.

The money will help hospitals and physicians, said Stephen Frayne, vice president of health policy at the Connecticut Health Association.

The recession has sent hospital finances reeling with \$200 million in investment losses, he said. This has slowed adoption of electronic records.

"We all agree that it's the right thing and an important thing to do but, until now, we haven't had the money," Frayne said.

Another panelist, Dr. Kenneth Dardick, cooled concerns about privacy because the IT project will be overseen by a national coordinator.

"There will be no central database," he said. "Your records stay with your doctor."

Although he's used electronic records since 1998 and approves of high-paying jobs the stimulus may help create, Dardick cautioned against expecting a cure-all for health-industry problems.

"Electronic records are not the Holy Grail," he said.