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GOP Stalwarts' Top 10 List For Health Overhaul

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Yesterday we featured some core GOP health care ideas that have been refined during the past couple of decades by conservative health wonks such as John Goodman, of the Texas-based National Center for Policy Analysis. Today, you can read about those plans and some more from Goodman himself.

Goodman and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich offer an explicit response to President Obama's recent call for more ideas from Republicans in a Wall Street Journal op-ed today. They write, "If the president is serious about building a system that delivers more quality choices at lower cost for every American, here's where he should start," and then launch into their top 10 list.

No. 1 on the list is changing the tax benefit for employer-sponsored insurance that they argue subsidizes the employed -- including those covered by high-end Cadillac plans -- but provides no help at all to those who buy their own coverage. As we've pointed out, Goodman has been on top of that issue for some time.

Another suggestion is making more information about the cost and quality of medical treatments and providers available to consumers in hopes that they would shop more judiciously for a better price. Current state-sponsored efforts at lifting the veil on

health costs have been fraught with challenges, in part because the actual prices of health care are often negotiated in private between insurance companies and doctors and hospitals, and patients with insurance are sheltered from much of the cost, Goodman has said in earlier interviews.

Goodman and Gingrich call for more money to fight health care fraud, something highlighted in President Obama's budget proposal last week, and they suggest fast-tracking Food and Drug Administration approval of new drugs and devices.

Meanwhile, the FDA said yesterday that they are considering slowing down one fast-track path to medical device approval.

Malpractice reform rang in at No. 7 in the Gingrich-Goodman list.

These days, Gingrich, who resigned his congressional seat in 1997 after an ethics reprimand and mutiny by rank-and-file Republicans, is running the Center for Health Transformation, a for-profit think tank. The center's Web site says, "Small changes or reactionary fixes to separate pieces of the current system have not and will not work. We need a system-wide transformation."

Plenty of health thinkers share that view -- from single-payer advocates to libertarians who object to the governments sprawling role in health care -- but it is not in vogue with congressional Republicans right now. Tennessee Senator Lamar Alexander, a Republican leader, just told the Washington Post's Ezra Klein he prefers a "step by step" approach.

And, though Republicans maintained unified opposition to Democratic overhaul plans, other fractures are appearing as well as they search for more substantive ideas. The New York Times points out that Rep. David Camp, R-Mich., has resisted proposals that affect the tax advantage for employer-sponsored coverage. In his home state, the legions of unionized auto workers do not take kindly to that reform suggestion.