

# Ripon Educational Fund Holds 2nd Annual Fall Forum on The Integration of Information Technology Into U.S. & European Health Systems

October 18, 2005

On Tuesday, October 18, 2005, more than forty Ripon Educational Fund (REF) members, Congressional leaders, staffers, and friends participated in REF's 2nd annual Fall Forum, *The Integration of Information Technology into U.S. and European Health Systems*, which was held in the Rayburn House Office Building. The top-notch panel included **Congresswoman Nancy Johnson** (R-CT); **Ticia Gerber**, Vice President of International Programs at eHealth Initiative; **Dr. Hannu Hanhijärvi**, Healthcare Programme Director of the National Fund for Research & Development, Finland; **Anthony Nowlan**, MD, PhD, Director of Personal Health Systems Ltd., UK and Former Executive Director of the NHS Information Authority; **Patrick McMahon**, Senior Attorney at Microsoft Corporation; and **Dean Rosen**, Principal at Mehlman Vogel Castagnetti, Inc. and Former Counsel and Director of Health Policy in the Office of Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist.



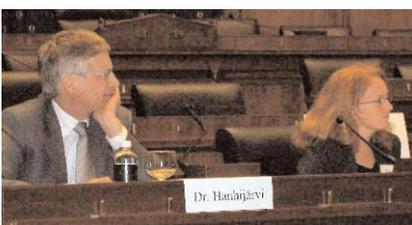
*Cong. Nancy Johnson moderated the fall forum.*

**REF Chairman Ed Bethune** kicked-off the event by noting how the subject for this forum emerged from the 2004 TransAtlantic Conference (TAC) in Budapest, Hungary. "This is a great example of how our substantive and intensive policy discussions during our TransAtlantic Conferences can provide the seeds for future in-depth panel discussion here in the U.S.," Chairman Bethune added. Special guests, His Excellency András Simonyi, Hungarian Ambassador to the U.S. and his wife attended the event.

Congresswoman Nancy Johnson, Chairman of the Ways & Means Subcommittee on Health and a recognized national leader on health policy issues, moderated the panel. She emphasized the importance of information technology (IT) in the healthcare system and added that her health Information Technology consensus bill will be introduced soon. She noted the implementation of an interoperable health IT system will have a dramatic impact on the quality of health care in the U.S. as it is beginning to do in the EU countries that employ such an approach.

Ticia Gerber, who just returned from health IT meetings in Europe, provided an overview of current EU and U.S. efforts on health IT and noted that the European Union has crafted an action plan to guide its member-nations in their move to electronic health records. Other multinational organizations, like the World Health Organization and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, also promote IT to improve health care within the EU and the U.S. Ms. Gerber added that the EU recognizes the importance of collaborating with the U.S. to develop a seamless global health IT network.

Dr. Hannu Hanhijärvi discussed Finland's health IT program as it currently exists and its ambitious plans to integrate this program nationwide in the next few years. Although Finland's electronic record systems are advanced, Dr. Hanhijärvi explained that the records are maintained by 430 separate municipalities and that their computer systems are often not compatible. Regardless, the existence of these patient records will ease the transition to a Finnish nation-wide electronic health network. Finland's municipal plans contrast with the U.S. where no standardized local or state health systems exist as a basis for a coast-to-coast health IT network.



*Panelists Hannu Hanhijärvi (l) and Ticia Gerber participate in the fall forum.*

Patrick McMahon, an attorney for Microsoft's Healthcare and Retail Industry sales groups discussed his experience in coordinating and assembling the high technology industry's electronic health record management systems and shared the industry's views about how the private sector and the government can best collaborate on health IT systems. Mr. McMahon believes it is vital that interoperable health IT systems be focused on medical professionals and their patients and that technical standards be established by collaborative IT industry forums open to all qualified participants.

Dean Rosen, who until last month served as Counsel and Director of Health Policy for Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, played a central role in consolidating competing Senate health IT bills while on the Hill. Mr. Rosen pointed to wide-ranging bipartisan support as a positive sign that the U.S. Congress will enact a health IT bill this year. He also noted the potential benefits of health IT, which range from freeing patients from the hassle of filling out new paperwork for each physician visit, to saving health care administrative costs, to improving the overall quality of health care.

Dr. Anthony Nowlan concluded the panel presentation by outlining what Great Britain faced with health IT integration. While Great Britain is regarded as a role model for other nations planning health IT initiatives, Dr. Nowlan described how they have yet to find the right balance between a centralized and decentralized approach. He added that Great Britain is divided into five separate regions for the purpose of computerizing health records with a small bundle of health IT services, known as a "spine," providing some minimal connectivity.

Following the Forum, REF members and panelists were divided into smaller groups to continue the policy discussions during dinner at Italian, Spanish and French restaurants. These smaller group dinner discussions have become a hallmark during the TransAtlantic Conference and provided participants time to discuss the topic in greater detail.

The Ripon Educational Fund is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to a non-partisan examination of international public policy. REF funds scholarships, conducts periodic workshops and facilitates the exchange of ideas among American and foreign government officials, scholars, corporate leaders, and other public policy experts.

If you have any questions, please contact REF's President Terri Pazirandeh at (703) 536-4040 (tpazirandeh@riponfund.org). Thank you for your continued support.

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