

Government Health IT

Internet Industry Group Joins The Political Fray Over Health IT

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The U.S. Internet Industry Association jumped into the politics of health information technology today, endorsing two health IT bills pending in the Senate and calling for government policies that encourage deployment of broadband networks that could be the foundation of a nationwide health information network. "We really think there needs to be a more concerted federal effort" to foster health IT, said David McClure, president of USIIA and author of a white paper titled "e-Health and America's Broadband Networks" that the association released today.

USIIA, a trade association of companies that offer Internet services and connectivity, also called for reform of the Agriculture Department's Rural Utility Service loan program. It finances broadband in rural areas, which are the areas most likely to be lacking the service.

"It hasn't been as effective as it could be," McClure said in a telephone call with reporters, because the loans can be used to build out broadband in areas that already have it. In addition, the association called for incentives for doctors to adopt health IT and for creation of more public-private partnerships to finance broadband deployment and health IT. It also said so-called net neutrality – a topic that has provoked many debates in Washington this year – would work to the detriment of health IT by forbidding Internet companies from giving priority on their networks to urgent health care traffic. "American consumers should not be forced to accept a 'one-size-fits-all' broadband service that places critical medical monitoring and health care on the same footing as music and video downloads or noncritical communications," the white paper said. The two bills endorsed by the association are S.1455, the Health Information Technology and Privacy Advancement Act, whose primary sponsor is Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.) and S.1693, the Wired For Healthcare Quality Act, a bipartisan bill approved by the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.