Coping with the Cost of Healthcare in Tifton

Report by: Jan Levinson

The dedicated team from the Russell Forum for Civic Life in Georgia was on the road again this week -- traveling to meet with citizens in Tifton, Georgia on Wednesday, October 22nd for the third deliberation on the issue of health care. Our venue: the Leroy Rogers Senior Citizens’ Center, just a few blocks away from the heart of downtown. Jill Severn, who manages civic engagement and outreach work for the Russell Library, and Dr. Babafemi Elufiede, Chair of the History Department at Albany State University, served as moderators for the discussion. Retired UGA professor Dr. Margaret Holt served as observer, while Jan Levinson took on the role of recorder.

As in the two previous deliberations held on this topic, at the Carter Presidential Library (9/17/08) and the Russell Library in Athens (9/25/08) respectively, this discussion focused on three suggested approaches to resolving flaws in the current US health care system. This forum was enriched by the presence of two local physicians, who provided information from an insider’s perspective – as well as relevant statistics. Men and women were equally represented in the group and all participants were age 55 and above.

Notable Moments in the Deliberation:

- One of the physicians in the crowd described flu shots as something one does for the whole community – an individual action that prevents others from becoming ill. Another participant said that she had always considered flu shots something she did for herself and not for others – but rethought her commitment to the practice after the physicians comment.
In discussing measures that could be taken to reduce costs in health care, the entire group unanimously agreed that advertisements for prescription drugs should be banned on television. In the end, they felt that tax payer money is paying for these advertisements which only encourage people to self-diagnose and demand unnecessary drugs from their doctors.

In talks about rapidly advancing medical technology, the group discussed excessive (and expensive) testing that takes place during visits to the doctor. Participants felt that although extra tests are often unnecessary, doctors tend to test more to avoid malpractice suits.

For more information on the Russell Forum for Civic Life in Georgia, visit http://www.libs.uga.edu/russell/rfclg, call (706) 542-5788, or email russellforum@gmail.com