Gephardt pushes for more investment in medical research, says it can cut costs, find cures

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JOHNSTON, Iowa (AP) — Former U.S. Rep. Richard Gephardt pushed Friday for Iowa to expand its focus on public health, arguing the state has the medical infrastructure in place to make it a leader in the field.

"Iowa, having great research facilities, is an important part of our discussion," Gephardt said during a taping of Iowa Public Television's "Iowa Press" program, which airs during the weekend. "If you are going to have a more efficient health care delivery system, which is what we all want, you have got to have more new answers to dreaded diseases like cancer, like Alzheimer's, like Parkinson's."

The visit marked Gephardt's return to a state where he has invested significant political capital over the years. Gephardt won the state's precinct caucuses when he unsuccessfully sought the Democratic presidential nomination in 1988.

He fared far worse in 2004, when a poor caucus finish ended his presidential ambitions after he had given up the House seat he had held for 28 years.

On Friday, Gephardt argued for more investment in medical research, which he said holds the key to reducing health care costs by finding solutions and cures to deadly and expensive diseases.

"We believe we can move faster to get more answers to these problems," Gephardt said. "If we can find those answers, we're going to save a lot of money."

Pushing for expanded health care was a centerpiece of Gephardt's presidential campaigns, and he said he was carrying out that effort in a different venue. Since leaving Congress, Gephardt has become a lobbyist with some clients, such as the pharmaceutical industry, that have generated criticism.

Gephardt said he is an ardent advocate of the health care reform measure working its way through Congress.

"When I was leader I couldn't get it done," he said. "I'm excited that they're getting it done."

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