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Guest: Governor Phil Bredesen
Host: Glen Tullman

The following is a transcript of the original audiocast, which is available for listening at www.allscripts.com.

Glen Tullman: Welcome to NewsMaker, the monthly audiocast that explores the cutting edge where information technology meets health care. Each month we bring you the latest technologies and newsmakers who are driving changes that make a real difference in our healthcare system today. I'm Glen Tullman, Chief Executive Officer of Allscripts, and your host for NewsMaker. This month I'm talking to you from the floor of the HIMSS Annual Conference and Exposition in New Orleans, where it's my honor to have as my guest Governor Phil Bredesen of Tennessee. Governor Bredesen has made a national reputation for reforming and even challenging healthcare through innovative new approaches to old problems. He required managed care organizations in the State to assume more financial risk in the delivery of benefits to the State's public health program known as TennCare. He also increased efforts to stamp out fraud and abuse in TennCare, and successfully defended the State's right to place limits on prescription drug use by tenant care patients. Governor Bredesen has also pushed the state to make better use of healthcare information technology. For example, the Governor's volunteer e-health initiative is one of five federally funded healthcare information technology demonstration projects designed to layout a national blueprint for improving the quality of healthcare while reducing costs in the healthcare system, and he joins us fresh from delivering the keynote speech at HIMSS this morning. Governor, thank you for joining us today.

Governor Phil Bredesen: Thank you it's great being here.

Tullman: Well, it's a pleasure to have you, so let's get right to it. This morning, I was interested to hear about the State Alliance for E-Health, which you co-chair with Jim Douglas, the Governor of Vermont. The goal of the alliance as I understand it, is to ultimately produce some model legislation that states could adopt to not only accelerate the adoption of healthcare information technology, but to ensure that it's used wisely. Can you tell us what some of the legislation might look like and how you think it might help?

Gov. Bredeesen: We're trying to start out by narrowing our focus and concentrating on a few areas where we think we can really make a difference. One of them is privacy, and we've set up a task force on privacy, really to take a look at state laws and in the light of what's needed in today's world of interoperability, see if there are privacy laws that might need to be changed, and ultimately perhaps recommend some model legislation that would protect a patients' rights and patients' privacy, but recognize the real world of electronic information interchange in this new century. We're also looking at practice issues, with practice information moving across state lines for example, the model of how physicians are licensed and how they're approved to operate in the state is getting a little outdated and we want to look at that, and we're also a part of this looking in a third task force at communications and interoperability with specific reference to the often very large plans that states operate. We operate the Medicaid program for example, state employees themselves I mean they typically would be the largest employer in a lot of states and to look at how we might as governors would be looking at how we could make better use of interoperability in the way we administer those plans.

Tullman: Well, that sounds great, I think much of healthcare could use an update and it sounds like you're looking at the key issues. Let me change the direction a bit. At one point in your talk this morning you said something that really struck a chord for me because it's something I've been wondering about for some time myself. You said, if I'm quoting you correctly, "Enough with the grants, enough with the conferences. Enough with the new paradigms, enough with pilot projects, this is good stuff. How do we actually get healthcare professionals and organizations to use it?" So let me turn around and ask you that question, how do we get more professionals to actually use this technology that's out there and available?

Gov. Bredeesen: Yeah, I think in a lot of the text in my speech this morning was you got to start out by simplifying. What has grown up as standards in this industry is vastly complex. When you talk to real practitioners who are using it, even well established standards out there are ones that are mostly useable for one version, maybe in one set of interchanges. And I talk to people about the Internet as almost the opposite extreme from that, very simple protocols, not trying to anticipate everything at the front end, not trying to involve everybody who might have a dog in the game but just get some things down and let a lot of people go out there and use this information. I think it also ought to be simplified in terms of how broad you're trying to be. I happen to like e-prescribing. There are certainly other issues out there but I think e-prescribing just cuts across so many different disciplines, it involves so many people. It has clear benefits to the patient and an ability to deliver better healthcare, and I think if we can agree on some simple protocols, agree on an area where particularly with the help of government we're going to start

pushing and start finding practical ways to actually get it into the doctors office I really think we could make some progress.

Tullman: Well, I do as well. So your real message if I were to kind of simplify it as you just said, is instead of get ready, you want to get going.

Gov. Bredeesen: Exactly, you know, we're so busy designing version 5.0 of the software system here and message pointing, you know, get 1.0 out the door, let some people use it, find out how it's working and you'll get a lot more adoption and a lot more information about how to do 2.0 and 3.0 than you will sitting talking at conferences or doing pilot projects.

Tullman: Exactly, and in your very state we have practices like Holston Medical Group run by Dr. Jerry Miller who are demonstrating that the technology works today, that it's useable today and that you can improve patient care, so we're in full agreement. Now, I know before you went into politics you worked in healthcare, and that you also started an educational software firm before being mayor of Nashville and before becoming governor and those are both areas that we share an interest in, because my view is both healthcare and education are critical to our country's success and yet on the other hand they're broken systems. So I think it would be accurate to say that we both share a belief that technology is one way to bridge that quality and that cost gap that we see. And so along those lines in healthcare and even touching on education, how do you think we can best use technology to bridge those kind of gaps?

Gov. Bredeesen: Well, I think there are so many things there, talking about healthcare for a moment. It's such a cottage industry today, obviously you're starting to see consolidations, there are big proprietary hospital chains now, the HGAs of the world. There certainly are a lot of hospitals organized into regional groups, but you know, when you get beyond that, still most healthcare is divided out and into small doctors offices, there's very little interchange of information, it's paper records and I just think there's so much opportunity to deliver better care and in so doing, cut the cost of care down by just using the various tools of information technology, collecting information together and making sure that when a doctor, when a nurse is dealing with a patient they have the relevant information that is pulled together in front of them. One of the benefits of computer technology to me has always been just enforcing a business model, you know, in the simplest world, McDonald's wouldn't be McDonald's without those little things that tell you how many hamburgers to cook at any given incident. Both of those fields if there ever were a field where some more standardized model would bring benefits it has to be education and healthcare and that's something I see you can do and proven again.

Tullman: Well, I couldn't agree more with your example of McDonald's. The interesting point about that is people get worried when you say McDonald's and standardization and yet, what you're really saying is standardize the basics to allow our world class physicians to do what they do best and that is really use the information to deliver better care.

Gov. Bredeesen: Yeah, you know, it's really thinking about realistically what does a real physician need in front of them when they see a patient. You know, not an ideal world of

where they've got ten hours worth of patients and what does an academic think, they've got fifteen minutes with a patient, what do they need to know and how can we get that information in front of them. And then when they do things, you know, what are some reasonable checks that we can provide on the accuracy and the appropriateness of what they do, you know, get errors out of the system and when the care is not optimal, maybe at least suggest that there's other ways of doing this kind of thing. There's other information out there, but that's something that computers and IT can do and we need to be doing it.

Tullman: So let me put you on the spot as we get close to the end of our time together and ask you is it appropriate for governors like yourself to mandate technologies like electronic prescribing that are so key to patient safety?

Gov. Bredesen: I certainly think there's a need for mandating standards. I certainly think there's a need for driving in the direction of establishing some beach heads and not trying to do everything all at once. I would have difficulty, politically, with my legislature telling every doctor they had to do this thing this way in their office. I actually think the standards bodies and the establishment of best practices is probably going to be a more effective way of getting that done, but basically I mean government and probably it starts with the federal governments and it's developing fifty different systems, it's not what we need to do either. You know, we're going to have to come through and say, look, there's a million ways we could go about this, but somebody's got to say this is the way we're going to go about it, and then let people accept that and get on with the business of designing within those parameters. I think it's standards and communication protocols and picking an area to work in and I think we could make a lot of progress.

Tullman: Well, I serve on the board of CCHIT which is the standards body, the semi-autonomous standards body set up in part by Dr. David Brailer and the government and I'm a big supporter of federal standards, however, I really do applaud your work because I think one of the things that's made our democracy so strong is having the states essentially be the experimenters and you know, your whole concept of get going now, let's do something and we'll improve it and we'll incrementally make it better, is so important in patient safety today. So I want to thank you for all of your efforts on behalf of the patients, on behalf of people in your state and on behalf of HIMSS for joining us today. We very much appreciate it.

Gov. Bredesen: Thank you, it's great to be here, and great to have a chance to talk with you.

Tullman: Well, thank you very much. This is Glen Tullman. I'm hoping you'll join us again next month for NewsMaker. For more information on the program and on Allscripts, please visit us on the web at www.allscripts.com