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Health care discussed in form of a play

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HIGHLAND HEIGHTS - Northern Kentuckians will learn the state of health care in the region, even though it might feel more like a visit to the theater.

Health care is the topic of the next Northern Kentucky Forum where a play-reading will be used to spark conversation. The forum, sponsored by Northern Kentucky University's Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement in partnership with Vision 2015 and Legacy, is "meant to be a sort of public square, where issues can be explained and explored," said Mark Neikirk, executive director for the Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement.

Past forums have included mock trials of educators teaching creationism and to hosting Gov. Steve Beshear.

"The idea of the play was luck in a way," said Neikirk, who met the playwright while browsing the Kentucky Book Fair. "But it also is because we are always on the lookout for ways to play with format. We want the forum to be a creative presentation of public policy and current events, not simply a talking head."

The forum will be divided into two parts. First, there will be a table reading of the play "The Way Home" by western Kentucky playwright Constance Alexander. The play is a story of health care told through the eyes of two woman facing catastrophic illnesses.

"The play is perfect, it touches on key issues - quality, access, cost, choice, dignity - that are part of any health-care discussion, so we think it will set the table for the panel discussion that will follow," said Neikirk.

The reading will be done by local actors. WVXU's Maryanne Zeleznik will play a reporter in the play.

Following the play, a panel discussion will follow where the audience will be allowed to participate and interact with the panel through "clickers."

The panel will include Dr. Gil Friedell of the Friedell Committee for Health Care Transformation, a statewide grassroots group advocating for quality, affordable and accessible healthcare in Kentucky, Mike Walter, St. Elizabeth Healthcare vice president of system development, Northern Kentucky cancer survivor Nancy Romer, playwright Constance Alexander, and Dr. Steven Katkowsky, director of the Northern Kentucky Independent District Health Department.

WNKU news director Craig Kopp will moderate the panel.

Questions will be projected for the audience to vote on with electronic clickers. The panel can then react and discuss the audience's votes.

"At the governor's town hall meeting, one question was whether the audience favored higher taxes for education, for health care or not at all; with the answer in front of him, the governor reacted," said Neikirk.

The forum will be held at 7 p.m. Wednesday at the Budig Theatre at NKU. The event is free and no reservations are required.
