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## **Thompson ponders personal investment in state health start-ups**

2/14/2014

Former GOP Gov. and national health secretary Tommy Thompson said he hopes to sell off four of his businesses within the next year and start an angel fund to help Wisconsin start-ups focusing on health care technology.

Thompson made the comments in a presentation Thursday to about 50 entrepreneurial hopefuls at a Wisconsin Innovation Network meeting in Wauwatosa. Some attendees raised their hands and asked him point-blank for money

Since 2012, Thompson said he has focused on running Thompson Family Holdings, LLC, with his son Jason Thompson. The former gov and HHS secretary said he's focusing on investing in new health care technology because his "expertise is in health care" and because he's very excited about the potential for cutting-edge inventions in the field. He gave as examples research into creating stem cells from a person's own fat tissue, cells that could then be used to heal ailing organs.

"It's technology and opportunity, and that's what each of you has," he told the group. He also cited breakthroughs in baboon organ transplants and the growing need for electronic medical record systems that could connect hospitals large and small.

People can go anywhere in the world and find an automated teller machine and access their money, he said, but if a person has a heart attack in an unfamiliar area, "How long will it take for the emergency room doctor to find out what medicines he's on?"

Thompson told those asking for funds that he would need to sell his businesses first, but would like to take "tremendous ideas" and "turn them into ongoing businesses."

"I'm not there yet, but I have the potential power, if I do well over the next 12 to 18 months, to be able to do it. That's my goal," he said.

Changing the subject to higher education reform, Thompson called for surveys of college graduates on whether they think "the time, effort and money was worth it" and for assessments of colleges and universities on how well they prepare students for jobs.

Unlike K-12 schools, which have come under scrutiny and calls for core standards, Thompson said for college and university systems, "There's not that kind of demands. It's important for us to test that."

Thompson also talked about his accomplishments in office, both as Wisconsin's governor from 1987-2001 and as U.S. Health and Human Services secretary from 2001-'05.

Asked if he would rule out a future political run, Thompson hesitated, then said, "I'd never say never," pointing out that he "is in great health."

Still, citing his age (72), the sting of losing the 2012 U.S. Senate race to Dem Tammy Baldwin, and fundraising concerns, Thompson added, "It's very, very doubtful. I got rejected the last time, it was really hard. I'm still paying that off. It's a great thing -- you can raise a lot of money when you're a candidate, but lose, and it's 'Who are you? What do you want?' Nobody returns your calls."

-- *Kay Nolan*  
*For WisBusiness.com*