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## **Denney: There is ‘considerable opposition’ to health exchange in the House**

*(Note: This is part 4 of a five-installment interview with Lawrence Denney, R-Midvale, speaker of the Idaho House of Representatives.)*

One of the coming battles in the legislative session will be over the creation of a health care insurance exchange, something mandated by the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, otherwise known as Obamacare.

Idaho legislators must decide if they want to create a state-based system or let the federal government do it for them. House Speaker Lawrence Denney, R-Midvale, feels there is “considerable opposition” to creating a state exchange, at least in his chamber of the Legislature. The exchange is an online marketplace where consumers could go to purchase health insurance or submit applications for public health programs like Medicaid or Medicare. Denney also said he has questions about why the state should set up its own exchange if a federal one wouldn’t be too dissimilar from an Idaho version.

Though he wouldn’t give an outright prediction of the exchange’s fate in the Legislature, Denney said the program could face a steep fight. “I would say right now, there is considerable opposition to it in the House,” the speaker said. “We are being asked to buy something sight unseen.”

Denney said that lawmakers might not have enough answers to questions to go along with creation. “I think that’s a real tough sale in the House,” he warned.

As for his thought on the exchange, Denney feels Idaho should control its destiny as much as possible, but worries that federal rules would prevent that if lawmakers create a state-based exchange. “Certainly, if there’s a possibility of Idaho managing our future, I would have Idaho in charge rather than have the federal government in charge,” Denney said. “But, from what I am seeing right now, I don’t see there’s a lot of difference between just giving the money back and saying, ‘federal government, you manage it and just go right ahead,’ or the state managing it with the federal government with the strings attached that we know will be attached.”

Some, including lobbyist and Idaho Freedom Foundation Director Wayne Hoffman, have criticized the state for taking money from federal health reforms while suing in the U.S. Supreme Court to block its implementation. Partially under Denney’s watch, Idaho lawmakers passed a bill in 2010 – a measure backed by Hoffman – to authorize the state to sue over the health reforms. The case has found its way to the Supreme Court and is expected to be decided in June.

Denney deflected the question about the oddity of accepting money from a law the state is attempting to invalidate, but did say he is uncomfortable with the mandates handed down by the federal government. “I would just have to say there’s no such thing as federal money, it’s state money we sent to Washington and they’re sending it back,” Denney said. “I don’t like us having to bow to the federal government to get back what is rightfully ours to start with.”