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Thayn: Let state manage social services

Programs should be free of federal regulations, legislator says

CANYON COUNTY — A local representative wants to reduce the role of federal government in social service programs and give Idaho more power to run them.

State Rep. Steven Thayn, R-Emmett, who sits on the House Health and Welfare Committee, believes federal regulations drive up the cost of social services in Idaho. The change would save money while still providing Idahoans with human services, he said.

“If the states were able to run the programs without the federal regulations, we could look at providing just as many human services at reduced cost,” Thayn told the Idaho Press-Tribune Wednesday.

Social services — which include programs such as medical assistance, welfare and child care — were never meant to be a federal responsibility, Thayn said. Nonetheless, he said, social services made up 63 percent of the federal budget in 2008 compared to 28 percent in 1965. “And it’s supposed to become 69 percent of the budget by 2013,” the District 11 legislator said.

A federal “one-size-fits-all” approach doesn’t make sense, Thayn said, yet social services are the fastest-growing part of the U.S. budget. The proposal — still in its early stages — asks the federal government to enter into negotiations with the state to allow more local management of the programs.

“For example, Head Start in Idaho — we might be able to use those funds differently and get more bang for our bucks than they do in Los Angeles,” Thayn said. “The whole idea of the federal government running programs that deal with the needs of individuals doesn’t make a lot of sense because they are so far away from your neighbor and what his needs are.”

Thayn’s draft, which he may present to committee as a joint memorial in coming days, emphasizes improved services and decreased costs.

“It’s a matter of reshaping the human services programs,” and maintaining a smaller level of government, Thayn said. “Is the federal government the best place to be making these personal decisions about the needs of the American people, or is the local or state government better?” he asked.