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McGeachin helps kill own Medicaid bill

BOISE -- In response to public opposition to her Medicaid bill, Rep. Janice McGeachin on Thursday led an effort to kill her health care proposal and replace it with a new bill that includes fewer cuts.

Earlier this week, the Idaho Falls Republican introduced a bill aimed at reducing state spending on Medicaid programs and benefits by about \$39 million.

More than 100 people signed up to oppose the plan during Tuesday's public hearing, while three individuals pledged their support. The most vocal opposition focuses on aspects of the bill that would have reduced developmental disability therapy service for adults.

One part of the plan called for ending active developmental therapy for adults once they turn 45. Another portion of the plan would have made it so that adults who do not qualify for a Medicaid waiver would not receive developmental therapy. Most of the new bill will be identical to the old one, but it will not call for ending benefits for those 45 and older or include the waiver requirement for adults to access developmental therapy.

"(Those changes) are primarily from what we heard during the public hearing and the level of opposition to those two items," McGeachin said.

Although there will be fewer cuts in the new bill, it will still include significant changes to Medicaid benefits. McGeachin estimated the new bill will cut state spending on benefits by about \$35 million -- about \$4.4 million less than the old bill.

Members of the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee asked McGeachin earlier this year to identify between \$35 million and \$50 million in cuts. "So (the new bill) is still within that range," McGeachin said.

Rep. John Rusche, D-Lewiston, unsuccessfully fought to kill a reduction in psycho-social rehabilitation services for adults.

Rusche, a physician, warned that cutting proactive services can lead to higher costs to the state in the form of higher levels of incarceration or hospitalization of mentally ill people.

McGeachin helped develop the original bill after meeting with Medicaid officials and health care professionals, but Rusche said asking them to identify services to cut to avoid the elimination of entire programs put them in a difficult spot.

"It's kind of hard to say this, but it seems like we're putting mental health providers in the position of saying, 'Well, do you want your right arm cut off or your left?' " Rusche said.