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Simpson won’t push to repeal reform law

POCATELLO — Worried as he may be about budgeting practices he describes as “hilarious” and “phony ” used to back the recent Democrat-led health care overhaul, Rep. Mike Simpson said Wednesday he won’t make it a priority to repeal the law.

Rather, the Blackfoot Republican said working on a national energy policy and reducing the national debt will top his congressional to-do list. Simpson is confident the Republican campaign theme for the November election will be repealing and replacing the health care bill.

“That’s what people want to hear,” Simpson said, adding even if they pick up seats in the coming election, Republicans won’t have the votes to overcome a presidential veto.

The health care dialogue should now focus on needed reforms that aren’t included in the bill, he believes.

“It’s not going to happen. To say you’re going to repeal it, even though I would like to, is not a reality,” Simpson said. Simpson said he and his colleagues support parts of the bill, including rights to insurance coverage for people with pre-existing conditions — originally a Republican idea, Simpson said — and allowing young adults to stay longer on their parents’ plans.

The provisions he views as most “damaging,” including required universal health care, don’t start until 2014. He’s confident the fate of universal coverage will be determined in court.

“We ought to be focused on trying to reduce the cost (of health care) rather than trying to include everybody ,” Simpson said. “It’s going to cost trillions.”

The requirement for universal coverage is derived from the Commerce Clause, which gives Congress broad power to regulate commerce with and between the states.

“It is a legitimate question to ask if they can do this under the Commerce Clause. Is there anything Congress can’t do under the Commerce Clause?” Simpson said.

To finance the health care reform, Simpson noted the federal government will divert hundreds of billions of dollars from struggling programs such as social security and Medicare, as well as from the student loan program. He’s also concerned with what he describes as an obscene amount of “special deals” for certain states in the overhaul.

“To make this bill come in with the numbers they wanted ... they had to cook the books,” Simpson said. “The numbers in this are so phony it’s just ridiculous. You’re not going to include 30 million more people in a health care system and it’s going to reduce costs. It’s going to increase costs.”

Simpson addressed several news reports indicating that Republicans were “whipped into shape” by their leadership to oppose both the federal stimulus bill and the health care bill. Neither bill had a single Republican vote in either the House or the Senate. Simpson said Republican leaders never said a word to party members about voting against the bills.

What happened, Simpson said, was that both bills were simply “so far to the left that no Republican was going to vote for it.”

Simpson also takes exception to criticism that Republicans failed to participate in good faith in health care reform. From his point of view, Democrats excluded Republicans in the process at every stage — both for the stimulus and the health care bill.

The first time Simpson saw the bill was in the House Appropriations Committee. He had 10 minutes to review the bill and offer any amendments before it was sent to the floor of the House for passage. Simpson also noted that a Republican actually voted in favor of the health care overhaul in the Senate Finance Committee, but then the bill was completely rewritten behind closed doors in Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid’s office.

Simpson argues a filibuster is a tool for a minority party to have a voice in government. He believes it’s telling that Republicans have threatened filibusters so often lately to counter the Democratic majority’s plans.

“They’ve just decided to do things their way, and it isn’t healthy,” Simpson said.