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Otter approves \$11 million in federal health reform money

Gov. Butch Otter launched an official [“Fighting Obamacare” website](#) Thursday, listing the ways he’s disapproved of federal health care reform. The page includes his executive order, signed earlier this year, saying that any state agency wanting to comply with the federal law needs his personal approval. Also on the page is [a document showing the governor signed off on \\$11 million in new federal grants](#), on top of the [close to \\$19 million](#) he’s already approved.

The new federal grant money will be for two programs run by the Department of Health and Welfare (DHW). The agency will get \$2 million for each of the next five years to offer grants to local organizations for programs to prevent cancer, heart attacks, strokes and diabetes. That federal money could go to city governments, hospitals, universities, health departments, and other organizations. “We had a number of communities that were asking for it, and so we approved it,” said Otter’s spokesman, Jon Hanian.

Another \$1 million would go to early childhood visiting programs being planned in four counties, Twin Falls, Jerome, Kootenai and Shoshone, in south central and north Idaho. DHW had previously gotten \$753,000 for the home visit program.

“It was not related to health insurance or Obamacare,” Hanian said. “That’s why he [approved] that one.”

“Some of Idaho’s most expensive social problems are rooted in early childhood,” a memo released by the governor’s office on the waivers said. “Helping families provide healthy, stable home environments during the critical years of a child’s development increases that child’s health and success later in life.”

In an April letter explaining why he set up the waiver requirement for the federal laws and vetoed legislation that would’ve set up a similar plan, Otter said the state shouldn’t implement the federal laws. “No one opposed Obamacare more vehemently than me,” [he said](#).

Otter’s staff has said that the waivers he’s approved don’t implement the controversial parts of the plan, including the requirement that people buy health insurance.

“It’s a case-by-case basis,” Hanian said. “[The governor] is not close minded about these things. He’s willing to listen to a reasonable argument.” Agencies must submit their requests for approval to the plan.

The governor’s office doesn’t show any further requests from state agencies to receive waivers to implement or receive funds from the federal reform laws.