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Risch wary of reform plans

Senator: New start needed in revising health care system

POCATELLO — It's not the health care system that Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho, believes is broken. Rather, Risch says it's the president's health care reform plan that needs fixing, and he argues the only solution is to start over on the process to overhaul the health care system.

"It's painfully obvious to me the road we're going down is the wrong road," Risch said. "We need to start over."

Risch said no one understands exactly what the current health care reform bills making their way through Congress will do and what the consequences and long-term costs are.



"We're talking about something extra complex," Risch said. "What Washington, D.C., is trying to do isn't working."

The three health care bills in the House are each about 1,000 pages, he said, and the one in the Senate is more than 1,200 pages.

"I defy anyone in this room to read one page and explain to me what it does" and what the consequences are, he told several hundred people attending Bannock Development Corp.'s 18th Annual Economic Symposium Monday.

He then read one incredibly complex paragraph from one of the bills.

"Nobody knows what this means," he said. "We need to know what the consequences and costs of this bill are."

Risch said politicians are incorrect when they tell people the legislation being considered will allow them to keep their current health care plan. Under the bills, he said, the only allowable health insurance policy can be a qualified health care plan written and approved by the federal government.

"Your health care plan will not exist after the federal government does what it is trying to do here," Risch said. "When (the president) tells you if you like your health care plan, you can keep it, he is dead wrong."

He said there is considerable bi-partisan opposition to the current bills, as well as formidable and growing opposition from the public. Vocal opposition to health care reform at town hall meetings is real and only the tip of the iceberg, he said, adding that he gets 300 e-mails on the subject on a light day and 1,500 on a busy day.

“Americans are very much opposed to it,” Risch said. “The sleeping giant is awakening out there and (health care reform supporters) are hearing the footsteps.”

He sees three likely outcomes of the current health care reform effort:

- As it did in 1994, it could collapse under its own weight.
- The president armtwists enough people to get it passed.
 - Most likely, he said, there will be a modified plan, that includes starting over, slowing the process, and breaking it into its component parts.

He said any reform needs to be market-driven, patient-centered and quality-focused. If it’s done that way, he added, “I think we can come out of this right.”

He also said politics needs to be placed in the background.

“We need to get more people who know what they’re doing involved in this,” Risch said.

Risch said any reform effort needs to break health care into its component parts, which include people, doctors and hospitals, and employers.

“It shouldn’t be done in one fell swoop,” said the first-term senator.