

Idaho Statesman, Wednesday, Aug. 26, By Colleen Lamay

Idaho Delegation, Kuestra Differ

BSU President's son died of cancer recently

Boise State University President Bob Kustra briefly broke away from a prepared speech last week with comments about his adult son's recent death from cancer and his up-close view of health care American-style.

But his criticism of the profit motive in health insurance is not shared by Idaho's congressional delegation.

"We are living proof of how for-profit insurance companies and HMOs target people who are sick and who are ill and raise their premiums until they can effectively kick them off of the rolls," Kustra told about 800 faculty and staff who gathered for his State of the University speech Aug. 19. He also had strong words for state officials about potentially huge increases in health insurance premiums for part-time state workers.

Kustra declined a request for an interview about his comments. On Tuesday, he issued a short statement saying he would work through the usual channels to help part-time workers and would help universities and colleges craft their own solutions for employee health coverage. Kustra spoke in favor of giving people the option to buy insurance from the government. But members of Idaho's congressional delegation oppose that.

"Kudos to him for speaking out and continuing to help raise awareness of the issue," said John Foster, spokesman for Rep. Walt Minnick.

Kustra said his son, who died at age 37, was still young enough to think he was going to live forever. Stephen Robert Kustra survived a bout of cancer and then dropped his health coverage because his premiums were rising rapidly, Kustra said.

The cancer recurred, and Steve Kustra died two months ago. His experience dealing with health insurers appeared to have opened a wound in his father. "It worries me greatly that we would leave health care to the profit motive in America," Kustra said as the audience clapped enthusiastically.

Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho, says the public option is costly and could cause problems. "We don't know how it will work, and yet it will take over \$500 billion from Medicare to help pay for it," Risch said in an e-mail.

Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, supports selling insurance across state lines and widening the pool of people who are insured. "A government takeover of the health-care system is not the answer," spokesman Lindsay Nothorn said.

Minnick wants to hold insurance companies accountable and make coverage affordable and available, Foster said. Minnick and Kustra have similar goals, but different ways to achieve them, Foster said.

All three spokesmen expressed condolences over Steve Kustra's death.

Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, could not be reached for comment Tuesday but has said the Democrats' proposals would raise taxes, cost too much and not do enough to fix problems.