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Risch weighs in on health care reform

U.S. Sen. Jim Risch, during a telephone town hall meeting Wednesday evening, said he believes a resolution to health care reform won't likely be reached until early next year. Risch said five proposed bills have been submitted, three by the House and two by the Senate, and a melding of two bills has been sent to the Congressional Budget Office to get an estimated cost of the proposal.

But despite the fact that it's in the Congressional Budget Office, little headway is being made right now. "One of the complaints a lot of members (of Congress) are having right now is that we can't get our hands on (the bill) even through it's been submitted to the budget office," Risch said. He estimates lawmakers will see that document, which totals 1,502 pages, within a week or two.

"I don't think there is going to be an outcome on any of this until next year," he said. Risch, coming up on the completion of his first year as a U.S. senator, said dealing with health care reform has been an "all consuming" issue for Congress.

"Since the first of the year, we have dealt with many issues, but since health care moved to the front burner, nothing else has been done." He qualified that remark by saying that some minor issues have been handled, but by in large, nearly all of lawmakers' time has been dedicated to health care reform. Risch said a major struggle within Congress stems from the relative nature of the words, "health care reform."

"Health care reform means something different to everyone," he said. "To President (Barack) Obama, it means he wanted 100 percent of the people covered under insurance. To Idahoans I have talked to, it seems to mean the cost of insurance."

That argument is a point of contention for Risch, who says it isn't even being addressed. "Unfortunately, there is nothing in any of these bills that is going to lead to lower costing health care," he said. "That is a big concern for us."

Another concern is the wide swath the reform brush will paint across the health care landscape. One caller, who spoke to Risch during the telephone town hall meeting, said she and her husband are satisfied with the insurance they currently have and asked how the reform might affect them.

Risch said he believes many people are in a similar position to the caller, but currently proposed reform would change both private and public health care insurance.

"We find most people are happy with the insurance they have, but they aren't happy with the price they pay," he said. "(But), the fact is, no policy will be the same after these bills pass."