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FOR YOUR INFORMATION
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Betsy Z Russell
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Idaho Health Care Plan bill introduced, gets three GOP 'no' votes

The House Health & Welfare Committee voted Monday morning to introduce legislation to authorize the Otter Administration to seek waivers from the federal government in order to launch the Idaho Health Care Plan, which would allow about 35,000 Idahoans who now fall into a coverage gap to qualify for subsidized health insurance through the state insurance exchange, plus allow about 2,500 to 3,500 Idahoans with specific serious health conditions to transfer into Medicaid, to lower costs for the exchange plans.

House Health & Welfare Chairman Fred Wood, R-Burley, said, "The intent here is we will introduce today, if that's the committee's wish. In about 10 days ... we will have an informational hearing only in the Lincoln Auditorium, where we invite the entire Legislature. ... And then roughly a week after that we will actually have a formal hearing on the merits and then vote on the bill. So we want all the opportunity in the world for this committee and the entire Legislature to get all of their questions asked about exactly what this program is, how the program is going to operate, what the cost of the program is, etc., etc., so we can make an informed decision."

Several committee members had questions about the legislation, with Rep. John VanderWoude, R-Nampa, saying it is too vague; and Rep. Bryan Zollinger, R-Idaho Falls, saying he had "kind of heartburn" about the lack of such details in the bill as the list of specific medical conditions.

State Insurance Director Dean Cameron said, "Unfortunately, the more specific we get the more difficult it gets to get it approved by the federal government." Cameron added that as a former member of the Legislature, he recommended against listing the specific medical conditions in the bill, though the list was presented to JFAC this morning and will be detailed at the hearings on the bill. "As a former member of the body, I didn't think the Legislature would want to engage in the decision-making of what those conditions are," he said. "Candidly there's more conditions out there than we can include. So we have picked the ones that provide the most savings to Idaho citizens. ... So that was sort of the rationale behind that."

Rep. Christy Perry, R-Nampa, moved to introduce the bill. Rep. Karey Hanks, R-St. Anthony, said, "I will be voting no on this. I think the federal ramifications and the fiscal ramifications to the other taxpayers, so just letting you know I will be voting no."

VanderWoude said, "It is my understanding that this just allows them to seek a waiver and doesn't give a definition to the waiver. I was hoping that we would have, 'This is what the waiver is going to look like' attached to it - put the meat on the bones. It sounds like a really good plan. I credit them for the option, but I think this bill is just too wide open. I think this authorizes any waiver regardless of what it looks like when it gets there. I know we're going to have a discussion later, but I think this bill is a little too broad."

With that, Perry's motion passed on a voice vote; Reps. Zollinger, Hanks and VanderWoude asked to be recorded as voting no.

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