

Otter's plan to tap tobacco money leads to partisan rift

\$11.4 million comes from a 1998 settlement

BOISE - A proposal to use \$11.4 million in tobacco settlement dollars to pay for the governor's "dual-waiver" health care plan caused a partisan rift Tuesday among the Joint Millennium Fund Committee.

The money comes from a 1998 settlement with the major tobacco firms. Four Democrats on the committee suggested the state is morally obligated to use that funding for tobacco prevention and cessation programs, rather than to address other state needs.

"That money can be viewed, in moral terms, as a bribe to the states," said Sen. Grant Burgoyne, D-Boise. "It's a kind of bribe to conflict us - we don't get it if we don't have a certain level of tobacco use. My goal is to drive usage to zero. ... So let's not use the money for other things and buy into the (tobacco) industry's attempt to get us to covet that money. Let's use it to put the industry out of business."

However, Burgoyne's effort to block the \$11.4 million shift failed on a 5-4 party-line vote.

"I understand the nature of the motion, but it's way too restrictive," said Rep. Stephen Hartgen, R-Twin Falls. "It would complicate an effort to fund a program I think we all recognize needs to move forward in some form."

Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter has proposed a dual-waiver health plan that would help about half of Idaho's Medicaid gap population qualify for premium subsidies through the state exchange; a small number of people with high-cost, complex medical conditions also would qualify for Medicaid.

The plan requires legislative and federal approval. The House Health and Welfare Committee will hold a public hearing on the bill this morning. It has an estimated cost of \$29.3 million. The governor is recommending that \$11.4 million come from the tobacco settlement investment earnings, with the remainder coming from the general fund.

The Millennium Fund Committee recommends how tobacco settlement dollars should be used. It has about \$15 million to allocate in fiscal 2019, although the joint budget committee approves the actual appropriations.

The five Republicans at Tuesday's Millennium Fund meeting declined to take a position on the governor's funding scheme. After defeating Burgoyne's effort to block the \$11.4 million transfer, they recommended using \$3.6 million for various tobacco programs that are operated by Idaho's public health districts and the Department

IMPulse

Intermountain Media Pulse

A TRUETONE INCORPORATED COMPANY

**news
CLIP**

11623 Lake Shore
Nampa, ID 83686
(208) 880-9814

FOR YOUR INFORMATION
The Lewiston Tribune

Lewiston, Idaho

Wednesday, February 07, 2018

William L Spence

Page 2 of 2

of Health and Welfare. Any unexpended money at the end of fiscal 2019 would go back into the permanent endowment.

Tuesday's committee action essentially leaves it up to the joint budget committee to decide whether the tobacco dollars should be tapped to help pay for the governor's health care plan.

"We're deferring to the budget committee's judgment," said Rep. Fred Wood, R-Burley, the co-chair of the Millennium Fund Committee.

The budget committee isn't bound by the Millennium Fund recommendations, but it typically gives great deference to the germane committees. The whole question of funding could also be moot after today's Health and Welfare hearing, if the governor's health plan fails to advance.

###

Copyright 2018 The Lewiston Tribune