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FOR YOUR INFORMATION

The Idaho Statesman

Boise, Idaho

Tuesday, February 20, 2018

Staff Report

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Lawmaker's health insurance pitch mirrors governor's effort to skirt Obamacare

An East Idaho lawmaker has introduced legislation allowing health insurance carriers to offer non-Obamacare approved plans, while also imposing new requirements for Medicaid recipients.

The House Health and Welfare Committee on Monday agreed to give Republican Rep. Bryan Zollinger's bill a hearing — which has not yet been scheduled.

The bill directs the Idaho Department of Insurance to encourage and permit insurance carriers to offer plans that don't meet the requirements under the Affordable Care Act. That resembles an ongoing effort by the state to allow such plans, stemming from a January executive order by Gov. Butch Otter. Blue Cross of Idaho has filed proposals for five plans that omit some ACA requirements. The controversial order has attracted attention in Congress and broad national criticism elsewhere.

Zollinger's bill also says adult Medicaid recipients should hold jobs, and limits lifetime participation in the federal program to just five years for certain recipients. Children, pregnant women and people with disabilities would still be exempt from coverage limits.

Supporters of Zollinger's bill describe it as an alternative to a separate bill already introduced in the Statehouse designed to reduce Idaho's health coverage gap. That earlier bill was also modified to include a work requirement for "able-bodied" adults who receive Medicaid benefits and aren't already required to work — a tiny amount of the Idahoans currently on Medicaid.

OTHER LEGISLATIVE NEWS

A Federal nullification: The Idaho House has halted a proposal that would have allowed state lawmakers to nullify any federal laws, regulations or U.S. Supreme Court decisions. The House voted 40-29 on Monday to spike HB 461.

Rep. Paul Shepherd, a Republican from Riggins, said his bill is needed because he disagrees with the outcomes of recent prominent federal court cases. Shepherd pointed to the U.S. Supreme Court decision to legalize gay marriage as an example of a case Idaho should challenge. Several members countered the bill was likely an active obstruction of federal law and would not hold up in court.

The bill would have allowed lawmakers to claim any federal law or regulation as unconstitutional. If the Legislature then passed a bill supporting that lawmaker's claim, the state wouldn't be allowed to enforce the federal regulation.

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A Department heads: An Idaho House panel has spiked a proposal that would have changed how a handful of state agency heads were appointed.

Currently, the directors for the Idaho Department of Correction, Department of Parks and Recreation and Idaho Transportation Department are appointed and overseen by their respective agency boards. According to the HB 496, Idaho's governor would have been in charge of appointing directors to those three agencies starting next year. However, the House State Affairs on Monday raised too many concerns to advance the bill to the House floor.

A School budget: Idaho lawmakers on Monday set a public school budget for next year that reflects a 5.9 percent, \$100 million increase in state funding next year — and it passed unanimously and with no debate or dissent, the Spokesman-Review reported.

Often the focus of much legislative dissent, the school budget has been less controversial since Gov. Butch Otter appointed a task force for improving the state's schools that laid out a five-year plan for improvements, including major investments into boosting teacher salaries through a "career ladder" plan. The newly set budget includes full funding for that plan's fourth year, at \$41.6 million.

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