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FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Post Register

Idaho Falls, Idaho

Tuesday, February 27, 2018

Bryan Clark

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Idaho Health Care Plan dies

BOISE - The Idaho Health Care Plan has died in the House. The manner in which the legislation was killed prevents House members from having a vote on their record for voters to evaluate in upcoming elections.

The Idaho Health Care Plan would extend subsidies to those in the Medicaid gap which are currently available only to those with incomes higher than theirs. It would also shift between 2,500 and 3,500 individuals with particularly high-cost medical conditions such as hemophilia onto Medicaid in order to produce an estimated 20 percent reduction in premiums in the individual market.

The legislation has been attacked by the Idaho Freedom Foundation as a "bailout" for insurance companies and as "Medicaid expansion."

The Medicaid gap has remained open without legislative solutions for five years, even in the face of cases such as that of Jenny Steinke, who died of a simple asthma attack because she couldn't afford proper medication. Two years ago, the continuing lack of a solution for the Medicaid gap led Dr. Kenneth Krell, then the director of critical care at Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center and the last doctor to treat Steinke, to charge in testimony that Idaho lawmakers were responsible for more than 1,000 deaths.

The Idaho Health Care Plan had been delayed for a vote on the House floor as leaders spoke with representatives in caucus and evaluated the possibilities of passage. Debate was due today, but when the bill came up, a motion was instead made to return the bill to committee.

Returning a bill to committee effectively removes it from the House agenda. Instead of voting the bill down if there was insufficient support for it, or passing it if there is sufficient support, the vote to return the bill to committee shields all sitting members of the House from having a vote on the issue on their record. With primary elections approaching in May, Rep. Heather Scott, R-Blanchard, asked whether the bill could return after the filing for new candidates had passed.

House Speaker Scott Bedke, R-Oakley, ruled the question out of order.

The vote to kill the bill fell mostly along party lines, with a few Republicans defecting to support forcing lawmakers to take a position on the record. Rep. Christy Perry, R-Nampa, and Rep. Eric Redman, R-Athol, in particular argued that it deserved an up-or-down vote.

Rep. Ilana Rubel, D-Boise, led the Democratic charge to support an up-or-down vote.

"Not only do the people of Idaho, many of whom traveled many hours to testify in favor of this motion, deserve a vote, but also the folks at the agencies who dedicated thousands of hours to crafting a very innovative plan," Rubel said.

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Rep. Fred Wood, R-Burley, who is chairman of the House Health and Welfare Committee, said he was disappointed that Idaho would go another year without a solution for those in the gap.

"I know that there's a lot of people who are disappointed, and there's none more disappointed than the chairman," he said. "... I know this is very difficult. I know this has been put off for five years. I know this can have been kicked down the road. I know that 75 percent of the people of the state of Idaho think this legislature should do something for the gap population. But, unfortunately, this doesn't appear to be what we can get the votes to do.

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