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Kimberlee Kruesi, AP
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Little 'optimistic' after meeting on health plan

BOISE - Idaho Lt. Gov. Brad Little on Thursday said he has a better understanding of the federal government's position after being told the state's move to let companies offer health insurance plans that don't meet Affordable Care Act standards is illegal.

Little met with White House advisers and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Administrator Seema Verma in Washington, D.C., on Wednesday. Little was joined by state Department of Insurance Director Dean Cameron and Idaho's Republican U.S. Sen. Jim Risch.

"After these discussions, I believe they understand where we are coming from better, and we understand their position better," Little said in a prepared statement. "Moving forward, I am very optimistic that we can work together with the Trump Administration to implement an Idaho-based solution for health care that works for Idahoans and fulfills the goals of Idaho's executive order."

Little, Cameron and Gov. C. L. "Butch" Otter signed an executive order earlier this year that paved the way to allow insurers to offer plans that don't meet all of the act's regulations, such as by charging people more based on their health history, or by not covering some health needs like maternity care.

In the March 8 letter, Verma responded to Idaho's plan by explaining that such a move would force the federal agency to enforce the provisions of the Affordable Care Act on behalf of the state. That could include pulling regulatory authority from the Idaho Department of Insurance and fining insurance companies \$100 a day for every person they insure on a noncompliant plan.

Idaho officials have since downplayed the federal government's response by countering that the state simply needs to continue negotiating their plan.

Little on Thursday didn't disclose many specifics of what was discussed at the meeting and did not include a response from CMS.

"Ms. Verma and the White House advisers had important questions that we were able to answer in detail," Little said. "Before these meetings, there had been a great deal of misunderstanding between CMS and what we are pursuing in health care, but now I believe we are back on track to getting an Idaho solution for Idahoans."

CMS did not immediately return an email request for comment.

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