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by Kimberlee Kruesi (AP)
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Faith-healing proposals introduced in Senate

Two different proposals introduced by a Senate panel would address state laws allowing families to cite religious reasons for medical decisions without fear of being charged with neglect or abuse.

However, the bills ushered in Wednesday do not attempt to repeal the most contentious sections of the law.

The first proposal, backed by Sen. Dan Johnson, R-Lewiston, would tweak only Idaho's civil laws to make it easier for judges to get involved in faith-healing cases. It does not change the state's religious exemption regarding criminal charges.

The second proposal does almost the opposite. It directs courts to consider other forms of treatment, like faith healing, before ordering emergency medical treatment for a child in cases of neglect.

Focus on the exemption has exploded over the past year in Idaho as more attention has been placed on the deaths of children among members of the Followers of Christ — based in southwestern Idaho — from treatable conditions, including pneumonia and food poisoning.

The Senate State Affairs Committee unanimously agreed to consider both plans later in a full legislative hearing — which has not yet been scheduled. Yet even if the proposals survive the committee, House leadership has previously voiced resistance to considering the proposal this session. Furthermore, lawmakers are working to adjourn by March 24, not leaving a lot of time for leaders to battle it out over faith-healing.

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