

## **Idaho panel introduces Medicaid expansion alternative**

KATHRYN HAAKE, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter's proposed alternative to Medicaid expansion passed its first hurdle in the Idaho Legislature Thursday.

The \$30 million plan — dubbed the Idaho Primary Care Access Program — would provide basic health care services to the estimated 78,000 Idahoans who make too much to qualify for Medicaid but also don't qualify for health insurance subsidies.

The measure wouldn't cover expensive treatments, hospitalization and most prescription medications for the gap population and would function by providing primary care clinics with an estimated \$32 per month for each indigent patient they treat.

Richard Armstrong, director of the state's Department of Health and Welfare, says the proposal would cost the state \$19.3 million during the first year of its implementation. After that, it would cost the state \$30 million annually.

Some officials are proposing using cigarette and tobacco taxes to fund the new program, however the funding source for the program remains unclear.

The House Health and Welfare Committee introduced the bill Thursday after Armstrong's short presentation and very little discussion from committee members.

The proposal must now clear both chambers before it reaches Otter's desk for a signature.

Idaho's community health care centers are a key component in the Primary Care Access Program. Heidi Traylor, CEO of the Terry Reilly Health Care Centers, fielded questions from legislators regarding the program later on during the hearing.

Traylor said she believes Medicaid expansion would be more favorable over the alternate program, but the primary care centers would be grateful for any help they receive.

"My worry with PCAP is that it helps me do what I do, but it stops at my walls," she said.

She said the reality is many of the patients they see need care for chronic diseases like renal failure or diabetes.

"And I can't deliver that," she added.

Last week, the Idaho Legislature had its first ever hearing on a contentious proposal to expand Medicaid eligibility. However, the panel declined to vote on the measure after Senate Health and Welfare Committee Chairman Sen. Lee Heider, R-Twin Falls, declared the meeting educational only.

Otter said in a meeting with reporters Thursday morning that if Democratic leaders want to push Medicaid expansion, they would have to get a "whole lot more encouragement" from the Republican-controlled Legislature.

"I have been trying for three years," Otter said. "I, as a Republican governor, can't get the Legislature to do it. And I understand their reluctance to that."

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