Utah among states that may lead in Medicaid reform

April 12th, 2011 @ 4:45am
By Richard Piatt

SALT LAKE CITY -- A Utah state senator is trying to change the growing costs of Medicaid with the help of former governor Mike Leavitt.

"We put $40 million more ongoing into Medicaid but did not fund education growth," he said. "It will happen sooner or later."

Ten years ago, the state of Utah spent 9 percent of its general fund budget on Medicaid. This year, the state will spend 18 percent of its general fund budget, more than $500-million toward a total of $1.8 billion.

By 2020, Medicaid could be as much as 36 percent of Utah's general fund budget.

The Legislature unanimously approved the first step of Medicaid Reform this year, requesting waivers from the federal government to make changes.

"(Medicaid) is the Pacman of our budget and it's out of control." - Sen. Dan Liljenquist

Public health advocates are cautious about details, but like incentives to keep patients healthy.

"There is a serious appetite for innovation in Medicaid," he said. "It's clear to those in Washington that innovation won't happen in Washington, it will happen in states."

There are plenty of questions about what Medicaid reform will mean to people's health care. But the reality is that some kind of change to Medicaid is the Pacman of our budget and it's out of control."

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Under the current system, patients can go to any health care provider that accepts Medicaid.

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Utah Medicaid Funding (% of general fund)
2001: 9%
2011: 18%
2020: 36%

There are plenty of questions about what Medicaid reform will mean to people's health care. But the reality is that some kind of change to Medicaid will happen sooner or later.

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