

Health care special interests speak out

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With the announcement of the Utah Health Exchange, plenty of special interest groups took advantage of the opportunity to air their thoughts on health care reform.

- Local doctors have rallied with the Coalition to Protect Patients' Rights in opposing the public option that President Barack Obama has proposed. Dr. Terry Sellers, an obstetrician in Provo, said several doctors sat down with the health and human services committee in Salt Lake City and went through the 1,018-page bill.

"The health care reform bill that is trying to be passed quickly and without a whole lot of debate is just not a fix to a system that is just not as broken as everyone would like to think," he said.

"There's just a lot of junk in there that a bunch of people don't seem to like," he said.

www.protectpatientsrights.org

- The Utah Health Policy Project, which has been vocal in its calls for a massive system overhaul, said the Utah Health Exchange only represents a new marketplace, not real reforms. Elizabeth Garbe, the coverage initiatives director for the organization, said many more policy changes needed to happen that would allow everyone in at reduced costs while adding quality and value to the system.

"We think that proposals being discussed at the national level will help Utah put parameters around what they're doing at the state level," she said.

Subsidies, the extension of public programs and defining a minimum benefits package also will be important aspects of reform, she said.

www.healthpolicyproject.org

- Families USA released a report Wednesday saying health care premiums rose more than four times faster than earnings for Utah's workforce throughout the last decade. According to the report, family health insurance premiums rose by 98.7 percent, while median earnings rose by 22.8 percent.

This comes at a time when employers are cutting benefits or health insurance altogether, meaning more of those earnings are going to out-of-pocket costs, according to the analysis. The report attributes those higher costs to wasteful health care spending, an almost unregulated insurance market, a drop in competition and cost-shifting from uninsured people who seek medical care. The results, these analysts say, mean people just don't have health insurance.

"If this trend continues, more and more families will be priced out of coverage and will join the ranks of the uninsured and the underinsured," the report reads. "This crisis will only worsen unless leaders in Washington, D.C., and in the states take decisive and meaningful action to implement health reform that will make coverage affordable and accessible to all."

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