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Utah lawmakers dislike Reid's public-option proposal

By **James Thalman**
and **Bob Bernick Jr.**
Deseret News

Published: Monday, Oct. 26, 2009 8:53 p.m. MDT

17 comments

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The only good thing about Sen. Harry Reid's proposed health-care reform compromise is that states can opt out from federal reforms, several Utah lawmakers and health-reform advocates said Monday.

Senate Majority Leader Reid, D-Nev., announced Monday he will send a reform bill to the Senate floor for a vote that contains the controversial public insurance option and an opt-out clause for states that have designed an alternative to provide coverage for those who can't find a private plan.

Reid's proposal could well be the hybrid compromise that gives liberal members of the Senate what they want in reform and offers conservatives a way to avoid the government takeover of health care they fear, said Utahns on both sides of the debate.

Proponents of adding a new public option a la Medicare/Medicaid say it's a vital safety net for people who can't otherwise obtain insurance coverage. Opponents say having an opt-out clause is the safety valve that Utah and other states well down the road to their own reforms need to protect them from federal meddling.

Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, said he's "disappointed" by Reid's proposal, calling it "absolutely the wrong way" to go and amounts to "new window dressing" on the failed idea of a government fix.

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"At a time when major government programs like Medicare and Medicaid are already on a path to financial collapse, creating a brand new government program will not only worsen our long-term financial outlook but also negatively impact American families who enjoy the private coverage of their choice," he said.

There are also many American families who don't have that choice or are losing it when they lose their jobs during the economic downturn, Reid said, adding that once someone loses coverage it's nearly impossible to regain it under current insurance practices that in effect make just about everybody who goes more than a month without coverage ineligible for a new plan.

Americans should recognize Reid's compromise for what it is, said Judi Hilman, executive director

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of the Utah Health Policy Project. It both underscores the need for reforms to be a state/federal partnership, and it gives those in charge of Utah's reform effort confidence that tailoring it to the state won't be for naught.

"We heartily applaud Sen. Reid's state-optional version of the public plan option," she said, noting that even though 69 percent of Utah small-business owners surveyed recently said they wanted a public plan option. "I have confidence that Utah will figure out a way to make insurance affordable and accessible without a public plan."

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I love how these guys are reacting to a plan they haven't even seen...

Reading is fundamental | Oct. 27, 2009 at 11:22 a.m.

This is such exciting news. To think we are one step closer to...

Mowgli | Oct. 27, 2009 at 10:52 a.m.

Won't we pay for it anyway through federal taxes? Why not opt in?

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