

Feds Agree to Governor's Health Plan, but Legislature May Have Different Plan

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Audio: http://cpa.ds.npr.org/kuer/audio/2014/10/HRTF_WEB.mp3

Link: <http://kuer.org/post/feds-agree-governor-s-health-plan-legislature-may-have-different-plan>

Governor Gary Herbert has concluded negotiations with the Obama administration on his Healthy Utah Plan, but that doesn't mean it will necessarily take effect in Utah. The state legislature still has to weigh in, and lawmakers might be hatching a different plan.



The Governor has secured preliminary approval for key provisions of his Healthy Utah Plan that diverge from the Affordable Care Act. The plan would allow enrollees to use Medicaid dollars to buy insurance on the private market. It has greater cost sharing, and it involves a work effort for those who are able. While the governor may have agreement from the feds, the House Chair of the state's Health Reform Task Force, Republican Jim Dunnigan says state lawmakers need to see the details before they can make a decision.

"Lawmakers have not had a time to weigh in on this," Dunnigan says. "They've been waiting to see what the governor could work out, and I think they're also waiting to see what the Health Reform Task Force comes up with, and we're actively working on some ideas as well."

Dunnigan would not say yet what those ideas are, but he says there may be an alternative plan presented in the 2015 legislative session. He also told KUER that lawmakers generally agree that a category of the population called the medically frail should have access to health coverage. These are people who are physically or mentally disabled or have a chronic substance use disorder.

"I think that there probably is general agreement that the medically frail need some assistance," Dunnigan says. "We frankly also get perhaps the biggest bang for our buck as a society if we help those folks that are the high utilizers. They help lower the overall cost for everybody."

Dunnigan says many possibilities are still on the table in the legislature - from a traditional Medicaid expansion, to the Governor's plan, to a new plan that focuses on the medically frail. Or there is still the option of doing nothing, and preserving the status quo.