

Our View: Third-string health care reform in Utah

STANDARD EXAMINER

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Rep. Jim Dunnigan, R-Taylorsville, says his group of six officials agree on the broad outlines of a deal to expand Medicaid in the state.

Standard-Examiner Editorial Board

State lawmakers, or better yet, state Republicans, held a public hearing on the Medicaid plan that has emerged from secret GOP meetings.

Frankly, we're pessimistic anything will get done. Republicans have yet to sign onto this plan. It could be dead next week, sending us back to nothing. Also,

even if it passes, having the feds agree to it seems a long shot, in our opinion. If all somehow goes well, the plan might start next summer. It's outrageous Utah's most vulnerable have to wait so long for the dignity of having health insurance.

The proposal, which will be voted on by the GOP in secret on Tuesday, seeks to add poor Utahns to insurance rolls primarily by taxing doctors and hospitals and adding fees. The committee's reasoning is that medical care providers will benefit by having more patients, so they can chip in more. The extra costs are in addition to the \$450 million the feds would add if this particular plan was approved by the Obama administration.

The plan covers those earning as much as 138 percent of the poverty level, or \$33,000 a year. It's designed to help thousands of state residents who are ineligible for Medicaid yet currently can't get federal health care assistance.

Not surprisingly, the plan received some push back from health care interests. According to the Associated Press, "Doctors, surgeons and others spoke against the proposal, stating medical providers shouldn't be required to help pay for expanding a government program. Under the plan, licensing fees that doctors pay every other year would jump to about \$800, up from about \$250."

The hearing was crowded with 115 people wanting to speak. They were limited to two minutes each. One speaker, Melinda Turner of Provo, told lawmakers that she earns \$7,000 a year and lives at home with her parents. She has fibromyalgia but does not qualify for government help. Turner spends virtually all her income on health care. She told lawmakers if it were not for her parents, both of whom have Social Security, she would be dead.

Our pols in the Legislature should have accepted, like other Republican-led states, Medicaid assistance. Failing that, they should have accepted Governor Herbert's Healthy Utah Plan. Instead, we are now spending time on a third-string health care reform plan hatched by those most hostile to health care reform.

It's a crying shame.