

Supporters rally for ‘Healthy Utah’

Governor’s health plan receives support from officials, public

By Louise R. Shaw

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Rep. Ray Ward, R-Bountiful, (at left in photo at right) speaks to a rally about the importance of health care and the need to find a plan to insure all Utahns. Photos by Louise R. Shaw | Davis Clipper

SALT LAKE CITY – Calling it both fiscally responsible and compassionate, supporters of Gov. Gary Herbert’s Healthy Utah plan called on the Utah House of Representatives to put his plan to a vote.

Rep. Ray Ward, R-Bountiful and Rep. Becky Edwards, R-North Salt Lake were joined by Sen. Todd Weiler, R-South Davis at the rally on March 5, where many expressed dismay at a committee vote the previous evening that failed to pass the bill on to the house.

Despite a few more attempts to bring it to the entire body, the house did not vote on Healthy Utah, but passed an alternative proposal drafted by Jim Dunnigan, R-Taylorsville, known as Utah Cares. The scaled down measure has not been released to the senate for hearings.

The senate already voted in support of Healthy Utah, which provides medical coverage to Utah residents between 19 and 64 years of age who make less than \$15,541 a year.

Dunnigan’s alternative proposal got boos whenever it was brought up, as the crowd, wearing “I support Healthy Utah” stickers and waving “Health Care is a Human Right” signs, made their preference clear.

“I’m here to support Healthy Utah,” said Shannon Seymour of Kaysville. “I know there are a lot of families that need this.”

She was frustrated by the committee vote and felt the measure should at least be given a fair chance before the full house.

"This would give an opportunity to many hard working families who are really struggling and doing their best for their families," she said.

Speakers worked to diffuse myths about the plan.

This is not an entitlement program, said one legislator, it is a health insurance program.

"How ridiculous it is for us fiscally," said Rep. Brian King, R-Salt Lake, to lose out on "hundreds of millions of dollars of Utah taxes that we have and we will pay to the federal government in the future. All we want is that money to come back to us."

Ward told the crowd that without coverage for those who don't qualify under current guidelines, some patients may not get the diagnoses they need, or the treatments or the screenings that could prevent permanent disability or death.

"Keep pushing and we'll get this done," he said to the crowd, asking them to do so in a "polite, positive and persistent" way.

"Bad things happen when people don't get the medical care they need," he told the Clipper.

Rep. Patrice Arent, D-Millcreek, said Utah accepts federal money for transportation, for education and for help "putting out fires. Why would we make an exception for human needs?"

Stacy Stanford, a Westminster student who was injured in a car accident, said Herbert's bill was "exhaustively studied" and has "massive support from the state. It's the best piece of bi-partisan legislation this country has ever seen," she said.

Herbert met with federal leaders more than a dozen times, said Stanford, so how could a hastily written compromise bill be better.

Representatives for AARP (American Association for Retired People) were also at the rally.

"This really means a lot to people between 50 and 65," said Alan Ormsby, state director. "Healthy Utah was a much better alternative than anything out there right now."