

Legislative Update

February 20, 2017

The House Health & Welfare Committee voted unanimously to introduce legislation from its chairman, Rep. Fred Wood, of Burley, to launch a new state Health Care Assistance Program, which would tap the state's Millennium Fund for \$10 million next year to provide primary care and limited prescription coverage to Idaho adults who fall into the state's health care coverage gap.

"Because of the finite funds available, this program will only cover a limited subgroup of adults and is not comprehensive care," Wood told the committee. The services would be for adults who earn less than 100 percent of the federal poverty level, aren't eligible for either Idaho's Medicaid program or subsidized insurance through the state insurance exchange, and are uninsured. Wood said the program would be designed to "further the state's goal" to move away from fee-for-service delivery of health care and to managed care. The legislation also provides spending authority for up to \$500,000 next year in grants or charitable donations to the program.

Across the rotunda, Senator Thayne has a similar bill, to have primary care for the uninsured paid for with millennium funds. Currently, earnings from Idaho's Millennium Fund, an endowment set up from proceeds of a nationwide tobacco settlement, go to various health-related programs each year, including tobacco cessation and prevention. This year's distributions totaled \$9.6 million; another \$3 million went undistributed.

Wood's proposal bears some similarities to Gov. Butch Otter's proposed PCAP legislation (Primary Care Access Program) last year, which would have tapped \$30 million in state general funds to provide primary care to the gap population, but has only one-third the funding.

He said the proposal would still leave roughly \$6.2 million in Millennium Fund earnings to be distributed to other programs next year.

Wood said he's developing a list of co-sponsors; Sen. Marv Hagedorn, R-Meridian, who co-chaired a joint working group on the health coverage gap this year, will be the lead Senate sponsor, Wood said. "This is coming out of the working group," he said.

Insurance Issues: While the Department of Insurance has elected **not** to move forward with the proposal to have the director ensure network adequacy this session, but will again work towards an agreement this summer.

1. A bill that will require insurers to make public the salaries of their top 5 executives. This is the same requirement that hospitals have.
2. **SB 1046 Health Savings Accounts:** this legislation will provide a health savings account for all state employees who choose to have one, and put \$500 in the account for each. ***This legislation is scheduled for a hearing in the Senate Commerce Committee this week.***

SCR 104 Transparency Tool: This resolution directs the Department of Administration to either provide a transparency tool for State employees on a state website or work with a vendor to establish a medical diversion program. A key to reducing medical costs is for consumers of care to have price information. A website transparency tool would cost about \$100,000. A medical diversion program would cost approximately \$1.8 million annually which would be offset by up to a 15 percent reduction in the state employee health insurance product. ***This resolution is scheduled for a hearing this week.***

Pharmacists Expand Scope of Practice: HB 191 will allow the Board of Pharmacy to designate by rule the products that patients may obtain directly from a pharmacist for conditions that do not require a diagnosis, conditions that are self-limiting, and other low risk conditions. *There are similar processes in other states which this legislation is patterned after.*

Med Tech Licensure: HB 161 will require licensure for the practice of Medical Laboratory Science. ***This bill has some pushback from hospitals and medicine and has not yet been scheduled for a hearing in the House Health and Welfare Committee.***

Sign Language Interpreters: HB 46 creates a licensing system and licensing requirements for sign language interpreters. This would require medical offices to use a licensed sign language interpreter. ***This bill has passed the House and has been assigned to the Senate Commerce Committee where it has not yet been scheduled for a hearing.***

Most legislation from Germaine committees will have been introduced by the end of this week, the Joint Finance and Appropriation Committee has begun setting budgets and there is a push to keep to the typically unenforced deadlines. It is probable the legislature will wrap up within the next 30 days. There is still a large surplus of state funds that is being looked at to fund road maintenance and potential tax relief. These conversations will likely dominate the much of the remainder of the 2017 legislative session.

Have a wonderful week and as always don't hesitate to reach out if I can be of assistance,

Kris