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100,000 more West Virginians on Medicaid?



If the two houses of Congress reach a compromise on health care reform legislation, budget makers in Charleston as well as just about every other state capital will have to recalibrate future Medicaid costs.

Both the House and Senate bills expand the program that provides health care for the poor; the House extends coverage up to 150 percent of the poverty level, while the Senate bill provides coverage up to 133 percent of that level.

Sen. Jay Rockefeller estimates the Senate bill would add 100,000 West Virginians to Medicaid.

Initially, the federal government will absorb the additional costs, but eventually some of those costs will be transferred back to the states.

The question is how much more will West Virginia taxpayers have to pay?

Congresswoman Shelley Moore Capito asked the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Services six weeks ago for cost estimates. So far, she's heard nothing back.

Reportedly, DHHR is waiting to find out exactly what the legislation will say before it releases cost estimates.

This year, West Virginia will spend \$2.55 billion on Medicaid; West Virginia's share is \$460 million. That figure continues to rise as the cost of health services goes up and benefits expand.

But that price tag will rise dramatically if the health care bill passes and part of the cost of the additional enrollees is shifted back to the states.

Governors are beginning to panic.

Tennessee Gov. Phil Bredensen, a Democrat, has called the Medicaid expansion the "mother of all unfunded mandates," estimating it will cost his state \$750 million from 2014 to 2019.

Said Vermont Governor and National Governor's Association President Jim Douglas: "Unlike the federal government, states can't print money."

So states like West Virginia will be left with the options of raising taxes or cutting services.

Proponents of health reform say the financial impact of Medicaid expansion is overstated. They argue that shifting people from being uninsured to coverage under Medicaid will actually save money because charity care will be replaced by insurance.

But insurance coverage costs money, too. And the evidence shows that when people have insurance, they are going to use it.

Of course, a couple of states appear to have insulated themselves from the pending surge in Medicaid spending. Nebraska Sen. Ben Nelson was able to negotiate an exemption for his state from the higher Medicaid costs.

West Virginia and most other states don't have Nelson's sweetheart deal.

You can't blame the West Virginia DHHR for being cautious, but Capito is making a reasonable request. DHHR could at least provide a rough estimate based on the House and Senate versions.

The health care legislation will probably pass with the support of West Virginia's two senators and two of its three representatives in the House.

West Virginians should know more about what it's going to cost us.

Kercheval is host of TalkLine, broadcast by the MetroNews Statewide Radio Network from 10 a.m. to noon Monday through Friday. The show can be heard locally on WCHS 580 AM.

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Posted By: **Banderillo** (2 hours ago)

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The simple truth is that no one knows what this so called health reform will cost. While the CBO should be given credit for trying, their assumptions are merely guesses as to what the economic conditions are going to be years down the road. They don't know what may happen which could severely increase, or reduce, the cost of health care. Unfortunately, looking at predictions made on other national entitlements, the track record is poor at best. But the question is a good one. Just what will be all the (hidden) costs to the average American tax payer? Does anyone have a clue? Do the congressmen and senators want to know? Does it really matter as far as voting on this latest fiasco? The simple answer is "no".

Posted By: **josegiles21** (13 hours ago)

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Somebody mentioned Currently, a 60-year-old likely would pay five or six times more for private medical insurance than someone in his twenties but it may not be true always check <http://bit.ly/7bwEx2> for lower price coverages