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Idaho Health Care Leaders React to House Vote

Boise, ID—Today the Idaho House of Representatives voted to send the Idaho Health Care Plan (House Bill 464), a proposal that would have helped 35,000 Idahoans afford health insurance and reduce private insurance premiums, back to committee. The move came after the House Health and Welfare committee returned the bill to the House floor on Monday, following advocacy by physicians, faith leaders and Idahoans in the gap that occurred at the Statehouse on March 15 calling for a vote on the Idaho Health Care Plan.

“It is incredibly disappointing that our legislature wouldn’t even give the Idaho Health Care Plan a vote today” said Neva Santos, Executive Director of the Idaho Academy of Family Physicians. “Multiple representatives fought for their constituents today before leadership decided they would kill this bill. Thirty-five thousand more Idahoans could have had health insurance, premiums could have been so much lower for folks that need that relief next year. Instead people will remain uninsured and health care costs will continue to rise,” Santos explained.

Jim Baugh, Executive Director of Disability Rights Idaho, remarked on what could have been a win for Idahoans with mental illness: “This is disappointing because we know many Idahoans with mental and behavioral health issues are living in the coverage gap. This plan could have been a way to help many Idahoans struggling with mental illness to buy health insurance, and get at least some of the treatment they need. It isn’t right that they have to face another year of suffering in the gap because leadership didn’t want to take a vote.”

Nichole Stull, an Idahoan living in the coverage gap, reacted to the move to again send HB 464 back to committee: “It’s devastating that lawmakers refused to vote on this bill. What are they afraid of? They have insurance and hope, while thousands are stuck in the gap. Living in the coverage gap is terrifying and traumatizing. And until the legislature stops hiding from this issue, thousands of people they were elected to serve are trapped in a place without hope. Taking action, dealing with this issue and voting for this bill could have made life better for 35,000 Idahoans! They chose to let another year go by where people die because of their inaction. We are outraged they refuse to do their job. We won’t forget they failed us again,” Stull concluded.

Lauren Necochea, Director of Idaho Voices for Children, said, “Idahoans know we have to fix the coverage gap. We all have friends and neighbors who work hard but still can’t afford health insurance.” Necochea continued, “When a mother or a father can’t get treatment for asthma, mental illness, or another medical condition, it is a huge stressor for the entire family and can have devastating consequences.”

Legislative inaction will likely spur fresh interest in closing the coverage gap at the ballot. While it is challenging in Idaho to collect the required signatures to qualify an issue for a ballot initiative, an outpouring of volunteers has already collected half the signatures needed. We can expect new energy and new groups to begin to contribute to that effort.

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