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(Neb.)-Governor Heineman Asks Nebraskans For Their Input On Health Care Law



By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 09/19/2012 11:34 AM

Dear Fellow Nebraskans:

As we look to the future, the State of Nebraska has some very important decisions to make regarding President Obama's federal health care law. It's important that we hear from you about this issue. To that end, I had the Nebraska Department of Insurance hold public hearings in Gering, Kearney, Nebraska City, Omaha and South Sioux City the past two weeks. Additionally, I held several open, informal public hearings with advocacy groups, hospitals, health care providers, insurance companies and insurance agencies.

At these meetings, we heard a variety of opinions. At the citizen public meetings, many Nebraskans expressed strong opposition to President Obama's federal health care laws.

When Insurance Director Bruce Ramage and I met with advocacy groups, hospitals, health care organizations, insurance companies and insurance agents about health insurance exchange, we asked them to share with us their thoughts about what type of health insurance exchange should Nebraska develop, why and who should pay for it. Currently, the federal health care law requires states to submit their plan to the federal government by November 16 whether they favor a state-based exchange, a state-federal partnership or a federal exchange.

Normally, Nebraska would favor a state-based health insurance exchange to maintain state and local control. However, the more we understand President Obama's federal health care law, the clearer it is that the federal government is dictating and controlling what the states can do. The states have little flexibility except to decide who is going to be taxed and how much. For example, on the issue of an essential health benefit plan, the federal government mandates the states must choose from four plans dictated by the federal government. Instead of allowing the states to develop their own essential health benefit plans to reflect their demographics; the federal government is forcing states to choose from one of the federal government's choices.

That's not real flexibility, and without real flexibility on the key issues that impact health insurance exchanges, does it really make any difference what type of exchange a state chooses? That's what we are trying to figure out.

Additionally, I am concerned about the cost to operate a state exchange. As those costs increase, and they will, it will force states to reduce education funding for local school districts or raise taxes on middle class families.

The choices are difficult. I want your input on these important decisions. Please email me at dave.heineman@nebraska.gov or write me a letter (Governor Dave Heineman, State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509) with your thoughts and ideas about what Nebraska should do regarding the federal health care law.

--Governor Dave Heineman