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Future of Health Care Exchange uncertain

Last week, the New Hampshire Senate tabled a bill (SB163) to develop a health insurance exchange for the state under the federal Affordable Care Act. The House Commerce Committee also held a public hearing on a rival bill (HB1297) that would block any state efforts to build an exchange. Supporters argue that a state-based exchange is better than having the federal government run a health insurance market in New Hampshire, while opponents say the state exchange would only give the illusion of state control, while leaving New Hampshire taxpayers on the hook for running it. Either way, the issue of Health Care Exchanges in the Granite State continues to be politically charged and has morphed into a debate on the future of "Obamacare." But with this lack of action, New Hampshire becomes one of only four states yet to make any significant progress, along with Arkansas, Florida, and Louisiana.

In 2011, Congress considered a proposal (HR 2) designed to repeal the "job-killing health care law" and health care-related provisions in the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010. The House passed the bill on Jan. 19, 2011 by 245-189 vote and the Senate rejected it on Feb. 2, 2011, by 47-51 vote. In arguing for the repeal, the American Conservative Union described the Affordable Care Act as a "2,200-page monstrosity" and "the worst bill ever." The organization called for repeal of "the federal government's takeover of our health care system." The Obama Administration, opposing the repeal, said HR 2 would "explode the deficit, raise costs for the American people and businesses, deny an estimated 32 million people health insurance, and take us back to the days when insurers could deny, limit or drop coverage for any American." President Obama said he would veto HR 2 if it was approved by the House and Senate and presented to him.

The Obama administration said on Wednesday that 28 states have taken steps to establish insurance exchanges under the 2010 healthcare law, despite the legal and political uncertainties threatening the overhaul. Although, the Associated Press reports that states, which were supposed to be partners in carrying out President Barack Obama's health overhaul, the biggest health safety net expansion since Medicare and Medicaid, are moving in fits and starts. Fourteen states, including several led by Republican governors, have enacted legislation or already have the authority in place to set up the regulated insurance markets that are a key segment of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, according to a report by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). But those states that have adopted a plan are home to only 1 in 4 of the uninsured. HHS counters that an equal number of states have acted through executive orders or authorized studies aimed at demonstrating the value of exchanges, which are intended to extend coverage to 16 million uninsured Americans across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Yet, three out of four uninsured Americans live in states that have yet to figure out how to deliver on its promise of affordable medical care.

Among the lagging states are four with arguably the most to gain. Texas, Florida, Georgia and Ohio together would add more than 7 million people to the insurance rolls, according to Urban Institute estimates, reducing the annual burden of charity care by \$10.7 billion.

President Barack Obama's signature domestic policy move faces a Supreme Court ruling before July that could strike down its main provisions and a November presidential election that could lead to its repeal in 2013 if a Republican captures the White House. Uncertainty about the law's future has encouraged some states to hold off on the complex task of creating an insurance

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exchange, despite a January 1, 2013, deadline for states to act on an exchange or cede control of the program to the federal government. But in their latest move to demonstrate progress in health reform, administration officials said they could provide assistance to states that miss the 2013 deadline to ensure their participation.

Democrats who wrote the overhaul law had hoped that most states would be willing partners, putting aside partisan differences to build the exchanges and help cover more than 30 million uninsured nationally. It's not turning out that way. Some states, mainly those led by Democrats, are far along. Others, usually led by Republicans, have done little. Separately, about half the states are suing to overturn the law. Time is running out for states, which must have their plans ready for a federal approval deadline of Jan. 1, 2013. Those not ready risk triggering the default requirement that Washington run their exchange.