

Washington Dropping Part-Timers From Health Plan?

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - The move has received national publicity: The State of Washington could skirt the intent of the Affordable Care Act, in order to save money. Some state senators are advocating dropping part-time state workers from the health insurance rolls and making them buy their coverage instead from the new Washington Health Benefits Exchange, an insurance marketplace for individuals and small businesses.

Ann Joiner, an adjunct professor who teaches writing at Central Washington University and South Seattle Community College, is among the part-timers who don't like that idea. She believes her current group health insurance coverage is better and less expensive than what she could get as an individual.

"I'm assuming that if I paid a \$300 monthly premium, that would give me minimal coverage. Eye care and dental are not included, which I have now," said Joiner, "and those would add a further expense to my monthly premiums."

Supporters in the Senate tout the plan's savings of \$90 million to \$120 million over two years. They add that ESSB 5905 would offer part-time workers a little more pay to offset the higher cost of private insurance.

Joiner is convinced the pay increase would not cover the cost difference. She notes that state lawmakers also are part-time workers - but in the Senate budget proposal, they are exempt from the change.

The Affordable Care Act requires employers to provide insurance only for people who work more than 30 hours a week, and

President Obama continues to say that people who like their health coverage can keep it. That is not how the state Senate is interpreting the law, observes Joiner, calling it a hit to teachers' morale as well as their pocketbooks.

"I provide my own health care and my husband's health care, so that right there is a huge impact," she said. "You're telling somebody that they're not worth it anymore. After having the insurance for 16 years, when you've worked for schools in the state of Washington, what kind of respect is that?"

Teachers, nurses, Teamsters and other labor groups oppose it. AFT Washington has said almost all part-time faculty members would lose their group health coverage. Health insurance has been one of the only employee benefits for instructors in an era when state-funded colleges and universities have cut most faculty positions to part-time.