

Health Bill Lawsuit Costs Unknown

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State Rep. Dwight Evans demands an estimate

What will Attorney General Tom Corbett's legal effort to strike down health-care reform cost  
Pennsylvania taxpayers?

Corbett isn't saying and nobody else knows - despite high-level efforts to pry the numbers out of the  
attorney general's office.

A spokesman for Corbett, a Republican who is running for governor, said the suit, filed two weeks ago,  
would cost taxpayers nothing.

"I don't anticipate that it will cost - there will be no additional resources to the office," said Kevin  
Hailey, a spokesman for the attorney general's office.

Corbett has pressed his case by joining a suit already filed by Florida officials.

"We're joining a lawsuit with Florida - lawyers from the Florida attorney general's office have done the  
bulk of the legal research up to this time - and we are not hiring any outside counsel. The attorneys we  
have working on it are staff attorneys who work on many cases at once so they don't do billable hours,"  
he said. "So there aren't additional resources attributed to the filing of this lawsuit."

The suit has met with opposition from the governor and other Democrats in Harrisburg who have not  
had any luck in squeezing figures out of Corbett's office.

"It may not be a huge number but we don't know that said Johanna Pro, spokeswoman for state Rep.

Dwight Evans, who has officially opposed the suit "That's the problem. We need the attorney general to provide that information."

Evans has pressed Corbett to drop the suit, but to no avail.

Pro said there had to be away to estimate the cost.

"There is always a way to estimate a cost," she said.

Gov. Ed Rendel's office has similarly had no luck in getting an estimate from Corbett and Rendell's spokesman said there was no way for the office to make its own estimates.

"There are so many variables," said spokesman Gary Tuma.

Evans, this week, sent a formal request pressing Corbett for estimates.

"We need you to specifically calculate those costs," Evans wrote in a letter dated March 30. "In addition, it is essential that we understand to what extent you will divert existing resources to pursue the lawsuit."

Evans, who is chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, noted Corbett recently testified before the committee that his office was facing budget problems.

He quoted the testimony in which Corbett told legislators that his office was already "stretched."

Rendell has twice asked Corbett to drop the suit. Corbett has refused.

Corbett contends that the portion of the health-care bill that requires people to buy health insurance violates the 10th Amendment; which reserves many rights to the states.

"Congress does not have the constitutional authority to enact this requirement," Corbett said, when he announced that he would join the Florida suit on March 23. "This law threatens every citizen's individual liberties:

The provision that requires individuals to purchase insurance would not kick in until 2014.

Corbett estimated that law will cost Pennsylvania taxpayers more than \$1 billion in extra Medicare costs for low-income residents.

Rendell disagreed, saying the bill will help senior citizens and end "reprehensible" practices by insurance companies, and will have a positive impact on the lives of every single Pennsylvania.

He also said that the law will give tax credits to small businesses and will do the right thing by making sure more than 650,000 employees will have health-care benefits.

It will also prevent insurance companies from denying coverage because of pre-existing conditions and will insure that parents will be able to have health care coverage for their children no matter what illness a child might have.

Pennsylvania and Florida are only two of 14 states that filed suit in an effort to block reform. South Carolina, Nebraska, Texas, Michigan, Utah, Alabama, South Dakota, Idaho, Washington, Colorado, Louisiana and Virginia have all filed suit Attorneys general in all of them except Louisiana are Republican.

The White House seemed unfazed by the suits.

"Bring it on," said White House domestic policy chief Melody Barnes, who cited similar suits filed over Social Security and the Voting Rights Act when those were passed. "If you want to look in the face of a parent whose child now has healthcare insurance and say we're repealing that-go right ahead."

SIDEBAR

After admitting to state legislators that his office was already "stretched," state Attorney General Tom Corbett said he would proceed with litigation against the recently passed health-care reform.

Photographs

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