

Article published February 03, 2011  
Ohio GOP tries new attack on health law  
Legislators aim for Nov. ballot vote  
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COLUMBUS -- Republican lawmakers opened a new front Wednesday in their attempt to block implementation of President Obama's health-care reforms in Ohio.

The effort to directly put a proposed constitutional amendment on Ohio's ballot received a major boost with GOP legislative gains in the last election, but supporters still would need the help of at least one House Democrat to put the issue over the top.

"We know more about Ohio than Washington, D.C., does," said Rep. Barbara Sears (R., Monclova Township), one of the lead sponsors of the House resolution. "We've got to let Washington know that we are not the same as Maine or Florida or Hawaii or Alaska. We are Ohio. Our state has and should keep its state rights."

The proposed Ohio Health Care Freedom Amendment, if approved by voters, would allow Ohio to opt out of federal mandates that its residents purchase health insurance and that employers of certain sizes provide such coverage or face fines.

It also would prohibit a single-payer, government-run system in Ohio, even though the amendment's backers concede that is not what last year's federal health-care reform law creates. Currently, the Ohio Liberty Council, the closest thing Ohio has to a statewide Tea Party organization, is circulating petitions to put the question on the Nov. 8 ballot. The group is still about 80,000 signatures short of the roughly 386,000 valid signatures of registered voters needed.

The joint legislative resolution, which would not require the governor's signature, would bypass that effort and directly put the issue on the ballot.

Passage in the heavily Republican Senate is a foregone conclusion. It passed there last session, and this session's version, sponsored by Sen. Tim Grendell (R., Chesterland), has been designated Senate Joint Resolution 1 as an indication of its priority in that chamber.

But in the House, even if all 59 GOP members vote in support, the resolution would still require help from a Democrat to reach the two-thirds majority required. Wednesday, Rep. Ron Maag (R., Lebanon), the other prime sponsor of the House resolution, could not identify a Democrat willing to vote for it.

Cathy Levine, co-chairman of Ohio Consumers for Health Coverage, said that the mandate requiring everyone to purchase insurance is a trade-off to help insurers pay for the changes. "The insurance industry made it very clear they cannot provide coverage to people with pre-existing conditions unless everyone who can afford it buys insurance, and health economists agreed with them," she said.

"Insurance works on the principle that everybody buys into the pools to protect those who need help," Ms. Levine said. "None of us has a guarantee that we will never become very sick or injured, so we pay into insurance for those rainy days. If people were allowed to wait and buy insurance only when they got sick, insurance would be unaffordable to everyone but Bill Gates."

Three other states already have enacted such laws: Missouri, Arizona, and Oklahoma.

Meanwhile, 26 states, including Ohio, directly are challenging the health-care law in federal courts on the grounds it violates individual and states' rights.

So far, two judges have upheld the law. A third struck down only the individual mandate. This week, a judge in Florida struck down the entire law. Ultimately, the issue will have to be settled by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Should the federal government prevail in defending the law, it would open this voter-approved Ohio amendment to a legal challenge as well, even if it was approved by voters.

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