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## House health care chairman optimistic about overhaul

By Andy Metzger State House News Service 1 hr ago



HOUSE HEALTH CARE CHAIR OPTIMISTIC ABOUT "GREAT BILL"

BOSTON – Circumventing the joint committee process, a group of senators is advancing a proposal to overhaul the state's health care system to institute price controls on hospitals and allow employers to opt-in to the Medicaid program.

Typically a proposal of that sort would pass through the Committee on Health Care Financing, where Rep. Peter Kocot is the House chairman, but a hearing Monday was held by a special Senate committee that drafted the proposal led by Kocot's co-chairman Sen. James Welch.

While the Senate is taking an unusual route on health care, the approach, and the substance of the bill, apparently has not fazed Kocot.

"I'll comment on the bill when it completes its voyage over in the Senate," Kocot told the News Service on Thursday.

Gov. Charlie Baker has urged lawmakers to reform the state's Medicaid system, the biggest expenditure in the state budget, so that it is more affordable.

Kocot said that when the House takes up health care legislation, it should help seniors who have trouble affording both medicine and food.

"I'm meeting with all stakeholder groups. I'm touring hospitals. I'm talking to doctors. And probably more importantly I'm talking to health care consumers. I met with Mass. Senior Action Council out in Springfield on Friday with several of my colleagues including Representative [Bud] Williams, Representative [José] Tosado, Representative [Angelo] Puppolo, and it's clear that we've got seniors that are having to choose between meals and prescriptions, and I want to make sure that the House bill solves that problem," Kocot said. He said, "I've been talking to a number of stakeholders. I think they've been very focused on their process. But moving forward I'm optimistic that we're going to have a great bill to report out of the House."

The Senate plans to send the special committee's proposal to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means where it can be numbered and put in bill form, according to the Senate president's office, and the Senate plans to debate the legislation transitioning to informal sessions in mid-November.

The handling of the health care bill differs, for instance, from the way lawmakers are approaching criminal justice reform. On that major topic, the Judiciary Committee deliberated following public hearings and voted to refer one bill to the House and another to the Senate.

Because of their numerical advantage on the joint committees, House chairs have more sway over legislation than their Senate counterparts and senators have periodically sought to secure more autonomy in moving legislation towards the floor.

Kocot said he has been in touch with his Senate co-chairman on the Health Care Financing Committee.

"I spoke to Senator Welch on Friday. He was at the event with me," Kocot told the News Service.

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