

New Mexico looks at life without Obamacare

By Sherry Robinson
Independent correspondent

SANTA FE — Two health care bills moved forward Monday, a day when U. S. Sen. Tom Udall also devoted most of his address to the same subject.

House Bill 101, the Health Security Act, would lead to health care coverage for New Mexicans. The



measure drew a crowd of supporters during a hearing of the House Health and Human Services Committee.

The bill seeks a feasibility study first; if it's feasible, a system of health coverage would follow. The program would exempt federal retirees and retired military service members, as well as tribes and pueblos that chose not to participate. Coverage would rely on public and private financing and have cost-control features.

"We've got the opportunity with

public and private funding to get New Mexicans covered," said Rep. Deborah Armstrong, D-Albuquerque, the bill's co-sponsor. "If we wait we'll be years behind in doing our own analysis. Other states will be doing their own designs and will be reaching out to experts and we'd rather be ahead."

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Mary Feldblum, executive director of Health Security for New Mexicans, said that her organization, which began in 1992, is the largest coalition in state history with 150 organizations statewide. It includes 34 cities and counties.

“What would it be like if New Mexico set up its own health plan?” Feldblum asked. Bills have been introduced since 1993 and improved from year to year. The first step is collecting health expenditure data, followed by studies to understand how a plan would work. She said the study could be funded by foundations.

Among the crowd of supporters was Dale Tinker, of the New Mexico Pharmacists Association. “Our association was one of the early endorsers,” he told the committee. He said pharmacists wanted to be involved early and understood the bill isn’t perfect.

A number of speakers referred to the possible repeal of the Affordable Care Act by Congress without a replacement and reargued the need for ACA or some other broad approach. Speakers in support of a New Mexico plan included representatives from Health Action New Mexico, League of Women Voters, National Organization for Women, Communications Workers of America, New Mexico Federation of Labor, American Federation of Teachers, New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty, and New Mexico Federation of Labor.

Brent Moore, of America’s Health Insurance Plans, said his organization opposed the bill because it would eliminate choice; he also questioned its cost. Jason Espinoza, of the Association of Commerce and Industry, took the same position.