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### Plan for state to control health costs gets nod

Proposal would have Texas join compact with other states.

By Don Finley

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Updated 12:59 a.m., Thursday, April 21, 2011

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A plan to wrest authority over health care programs from the federal government and give it to states, endorsed by conservative groups, got tentative approval by the Texas House on Wednesday.

House Bill 5 directs Texas to join an interstate health care compact.

#### More Information

- [HB 5](#)
- [Texas Public Policy Foundation](#)
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Compacts, allowed under federal law, are agreements between states and often used to regulate interstate activities from water and transportation to supervision of former prisoners.

Critics say compacts never have been used in such a way, and that the bill largely is a symbolic gesture since it would have to be approved by Congress and President Barack Obama.

The bill's author, state Rep. Lois Kolkhorst, R-Brenham, said the bill basically would turn Medicare and Medicaid into block grant programs, giving cash-strapped states flexibility to administer them.

"It's probably the ultimate block grant from the United States Congress," Kolkhorst said, adding: "Obviously President Obama, with all due respect, has said he doesn't like block grants. Even if Congress gives us approval, he may try to veto it. That's not my job today to say what he is or isn't going to do."

Rep. Garnet Coleman, D-Houston, charged that the compact is really "a ruse to get rid of the Affordable Care Act."

Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal signed a compact bill into law Wednesday, and several other states are considering bills.

The Texas Public Policy Foundation, which has been at the forefront of pushing compacts as a way to restore the balance of power between the federal government and states, praised the victory.

"America's health care crisis is not going to be solved by Washington, D.C., but rather by getting those decisions out of D.C. and back to the people of Texas," Executive Director Arlene Wohlgemuth said.

Under the plan, states belonging to the health compact would ask Congress to give them authority to regulate health care, suspending all federal laws and regulations inconsistent with those of the states. Military, veterans and Indian health services would remain under federal control.

The bill would give the state the right to the same federal money it received in 2010, adjusted to inflation and population changes. Coleman noted health care inflation has been rising at a far greater rate than overall inflation.



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"We don't want to scare seniors," he said.

Supporters of the bill complain Texas Medicaid spending has grown by 170 percent over the past decade and will grow much higher when federal health reform increases the number of Medicaid recipients.

Opponents say the bill would deny health services to the poor and elderly in a state that leads the nation in the percentage of uninsured, and could jeopardize the Medicare program.

"The current effort may simply be a symbolic organizing vehicle for some proponents, and a genuinely radical alternative vision of the federal system nation for others," [Anne Dunkelberg](#), associate director of the [Center for Public Policy Priorities](#) in Austin, testified last month on the bill before a [House committee](#).



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m\_mroz 8:35 PM on April 20, 2011

I would be more enthusiastic about Texas getting involved in health care if it had a better track record. Our level of uninsured adults and children is scandalous.

However, the crazier the Legislature behaves the greater the reaction will be at the polls. Hubris is a gift to your enemy-Christmas has come early for the Democrats.

REPLY (7) (2)

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Indi 8:01 PM on April 20, 2011

Whenever you see TPPF's name associated with a bill, you can be sure it favors special interests over the citizen. These Republicans think they got a mandate, but they just had a bad economy with an unpopular President in an off year election. Why does the GOP always overreach?

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**Will-22168764** 10:48 PM on April 20, 2011

Right - I'd trust Texas Republicans to be in charge of a state health care system like I'd trust a dog to watch my hamburger.

REPLY

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