

The truth about the Health Care Compact



Shawn Sullivan

There has been a lot of interest lately in the Health Care Compact, legislation passed during the 2014 legislative session that if approved by the U.S. Congress would allow participating states the ability to opt-out of certain Federal health care laws, especially the Affordable Care Act. While I am currently the State Budget Director, I was the Kansas Secretary of Aging when this legislation was passed and kept a close eye on how it might affect our State's seniors. I would like to address the considerable misinformation about how the Compact would influence the Medicare program of Kansas seniors.

Many politicians and editorial board writers have tried to frighten our seniors by saying the Compact will privatize the Medicare system in Kansas. This is just not true.

Frankly, as someone that has worked for our State's seniors over the last 22 years, it upsets me that many are using this issue to their own advantage while trying to scare seniors receiving Medicare benefits. When the Legislature passed this bill and the Governor signed it, the intent was not to bring Medicare under State control nor to privatize the Medicare system, but to provide more flexibility with the ACA. In fact, Governor Brownback clearly stated that he "would strongly oppose any effort at the state level to reduce Medicare benefits or coverage for Kansas seniors."

The reality is that without U.S. Congressional approval, the Health Care Compact never becomes effective. Should the U.S. Congress approve the Health Care Compact, the Kansas Legislature must go through the legislative process of developing a bill, holding committee hearings to assure public input, and having committee and floor votes.

Several years ago, I made the mistake of changing the paint color and décor of a senior apartment building that I was running without properly communicating and getting buy-in from the seniors living there. Those residents responded with a petition calling for my termination and I quickly recognized the error of my ways. I have full confidence that the seniors in our State would not allow the Medicare benefits they have paid into all of their lives to change without communicating appropriately to legislators and policymakers.

Thankfully, Governor Brownback and his administration are committed to preserving those benefits and have no desire to take over control of the Medicare program or to privatize it as many have incorrectly reported.

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