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Jindal health-care revamp in limbo



[Show Caption](#) Richard Alan Hannon/The Advocate

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- Advocate Capitol News Bureau
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Federal action on Gov. Bobby Jindal's health-care proposal likely won't come until after the 2009 legislative session, Louisiana's health chief said Tuesday.

The Jindal administration had planned to push legislation to implement the revamp.

Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals Secretary Alan Levine said progress is being hindered

by the change-over in presidential administrations as well as delays in the appointment of top federal health agency officials.

“Right now they are in a holding pattern” in Washington, Levine told a Louisiana Hospital Association meeting.

Levine said it could take six months to get final federal sign-off on the state’s application submitted to the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services in the waning days of the Bush administration. That would put the OK past the June 25 end of the regular legislative session.

“We are in discussions with the Legislature on how to approach it this spring,” said Levine. “It makes it difficult for the Legislature to consider legislation without the waiver being done.”

Later, Levine said, “We cannot change the health-care system by shoving it down anybody’s throat.” He said it will take strong provider participation.

The Jindal administration is asking federal health officials to “waive” certain rules and regulations so it can embark on Medicaid health-care experiments in four areas of the state. Most of the Medicaid recipients involved would be children from poor families.

Jindal proposes abandoning the system in which government pays physicians and other providers for health-care services delivered. He wants to move to a “managed care” type system, in which a premium is paid for commercial insurance coverage. Established provider service networks that would be responsible for coordinating patient care.

The Jindal plan also would increase the number of Louisiana residents eligible to receive Medicaid — the government health insurance program for the poor. And that would cost extra money.

Senate Health and Welfare Committee chairwoman state Sen. Willie Mount, D-Lake Charles, said predicting what’s going to happen in the health-care arena today is “like gazing into a proverbial crystal ball with blindfolds on.”

Referring to extra health-care dollars that are part of a federal economic bailout package, Mount said, “It’s a big if. If we get the waiver approved. If they increase funding for Medicaid.”

Mount asked, “Will we be able to pass legislation if we in fact don’t know the answer about the waiver, the Medicaid funding and so on?”

Levine told the association that the state projected it would receive \$990 million in extra federal funds for Medicaid through December 2010 under economic recovery legislation. That was based on actual Medicaid usage, he said.

Federal estimates of the dollars headed Louisiana’s way are considerably higher — around \$1.4 billion — because the number is based on projected future use, Levine said.

Under any bailout plan, Levine said the state would still have to cover increased costs associated with care of the uninsured because federal program participation is going down.

Levine said the state still has \$771 million in alleged debt owed the federal government hanging overhead.

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