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Blue Cross Blue Shield CEO says costs for national health insurance may be deterrent, at present time

By LARRY PHILLIPS • Daily Leader

President-elect Barack Obama campaigned on bringing some sort of national health care plan to the table if he were elected.

Since his victory, he has already named former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle as his Secretary of Health and Human Services. Daschle has published a book "Critical: What We Can Do About the Health-Care Crisis," in which he said the U.S. is "the only industrialized nation that does not guarantee necessary health care to all of its citizens." Daschle added, "It is stunning and shameful."

So, will Obama and Daschle present a national health care plan right away?

One man, a former Liberal resident, thinks the current economic situation doesn't bode well for a national plan – at the present.

That man is president and CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas Andrew C. Corbin.

"As long as I've been in health care (about 36 years), they've been talking about a national health plan, and it's a great idea. But, nobody wants to pay for it, and we all are going to pay for it.

Health care isn't free – it's very expensive," Corbin said in a recent interview. "Right now, we're paying for the indigent care and all that sort of thing. But I don't think anybody who makes

money wants to have their taxes go up so they can help pay for all these other people that don't carry health insurance.

"And I don't expect that, especially with the (national economic) situation we have now," he said.

But Corbin was quick to point out that Americans do need some options or consistent means to acquire plans.

"On the other hand, having said that, do I think we ought to try to cover every citizen in America? Absolutely," Corbin said. "It's not a right, but it's one of those things we ought to sort of require because otherwise, only people who buy it or who are responsible or people who are sick – that's part of my worries – is that if only sick people buy it, then nobody will be able to afford it.

"What they are talking about now are individual mandates, and if they were to impose an individual mandate – that the insurance carriers had to take everybody, but they didn't say everybody has to be covered – then the only people who want it will take it – and they are the people that are sick," he continued. "And you can't afford to do that. You have to have the good, the bad and the ugly all rolled into a great big pot in order to figure how much money there will be, and it's still going to be very, very, very expensive."

Corbin said people who don't have any health issues would be resentful of that kind of plan and resistant.

"I don't know that I personally – or that Blue Cross Blue Shield in general – are opposed to that idea – that premise," Corbin said.

"That's just generally more business for us if it's done privately, and of course, I'm an advocate for private carriers doing that. The government doesn't even run Medicare – they contract for that, as well."

There are several other obstacles to consider when piecing together a national health plan, according to Corbin.

“One, if every single person has health care, we don’t have the medical equipment, doctors or anything else to cover everything,”

Corbin said. “Right now, it’s done through emergency services and things like that. There’s not enough primary care physicians in Liberal or Colby or any of those places to take care of that. So that’s an issue.

“Another thing, medical care in Kansas, certainly – and around the country – isn’t distributed evenly,” he continued. “You have a whole bunch of doctors in Wichita or in Topeka, but they are spread very sparsely around rural parts of Kansas. And certainly they don’t have specialty care.”

Corbin pointed out there are as many if not more hospitals in Kansas than there are in the surrounding states.

“And there are certainly more critical access hospitals, yet, people will drive across three counties to go to Wally World to buy fishing tackle, but they won’t give up their local hospital,” Corbin said.

“People are scared if they don’t have a local hospital, they won’t have a school district, and the town will shut down.

“But it costs money to keep that brick and mortar and keep it up to date, keep good quality – everybody wants a CAT scan, everybody wants an MRI, and that just drives up the cost of health care,” he added.

Corbin has spent nearly 27 total years with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas and became

president and CEO Oct. 1, 2007.

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