



## Ritter pulls back on health plan

### Initial expansion may have to be restricted to kids

By Chris Barge

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The governor who promised health care for all Coloradans lowered his sights Monday to covering more of the state's children - in stages, over time.

And Gov. Bill Ritter cautioned that he might not be able to find the \$43 million that would be needed for a bill being introduced this week to expand coverage to more than 65,000 of the state's approximately 180,000 uninsured children.

Ritter said in his first State of the State speech 13 months ago that he wanted to give every Coloradan access to basic health insurance by 2010. He said Monday that while health insurance for just the state's uninsured children is a worthy goal, it would require a new tax that Colorado's fiscally conservative voters aren't yet ready to pass.

"It's the right aspiration," he told reporters after speaking to the 2010 All Kids Covered Initiative. "The question on the minds of the administration, the legislature and I think the people of this state is how do you pay for that, and whether you pay that money into a system that's still fundamentally broken."

Ritter said the state may have to phase in funding for such programs over time - "until we get to the place where we're comfortable going to the voters and taking to them a plan that might involve a new revenue stream. But I'm not there yet."

The governor's budget calls for bringing about 17,000 more children onto the rolls of the children's health plan this year. Meanwhile, he and other lawmakers are focusing on making the health care system more efficient.

The Colorado Blue Ribbon Commission for Healthcare Reform delivered its report to lawmakers last month, saying it would cost the state an additional \$1.3 billion per year to cover almost all of the state's 785,000 uninsured. But even before the report was formalized, Democrats signaled that a health care tax was not headed for the ballot.

There is also a philosophical gulf between Colorado Democrats who want to insure the uninsured and Republicans who are more concerned with tamping down the erupting costs of health premiums for the already insured.

That partisan divide was conspicuous on the Senate floor Monday morning, when Sen. Bob Hagedorn, D-Aurora, tried to pass a joint resolution pledging health care coverage for all Colorado children by 2010.

"How could anyone be against expanding coverage?" asked Sen. Shawn Mitchell, R-Broomfield. "Well, if extending public programs will do more harm than good, will lower the quality of care, will reduce access to care, will reduce private coverage that's available, will shift people from private health insurance to the public roles - those are all bad things, those are all possible outcomes of immediately expanding coverage."

Hagedorn tabled his nonbinding resolution, but plans to give it another shot today.

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## **What's proposed**

### **Lawmakers plan to introduce two bills this week aimed at covering more of Colorado's uninsured children.**

\* Sen. Bob Hagedorn, D-Aurora, and Rep. Anne McGihon, D-Denver, propose expanding coverage to more than 65,000 of the state's approximately 180,000 uninsured children at a cost of roughly \$43 million per year.

\* Sens. Betty Boyd, D-Lakewood, and Nancy Spence, R-Centennial, and Rep. Michael Merrifield, D-Colorado Springs, want to make it easier for low-income families to re-enroll their children in the state children's health care program.

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