



Advocates praise passage of rate transparency measure

By Susan Redden sredden@joplinglobe.com

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With veto-proof Republican majorities in both chambers of the Missouri Legislature, Democrats rarely have much to celebrate at the end of the legislative session.

But local Democrats and others supporting health care expansion in the state are praising the passage of bills that ensure greater transparency in health insurance coverage and provide a little extra help to disabled residents who receive Medicaid.

One measure gives the Missouri Department of Insurance the ability to review rate increases planned by companies offering small group and individual health insurance plans to determine if the pricing is reasonable. If the increases are deemed unreasonable, the state is to notify the carrier, which may voluntarily change its pricing.

"Until now, Missouri was the only state that didn't have any sort of rate review — no transparency," said Dottie Elbert, Joplin regional coordinator for Missouri Health Care for All, a statewide group that has advocated for Medicaid expansion in Missouri.

It's "even better," she said, because the bills imposing the transparency mandate were sponsored by Rep. Bill White, R-Joplin, and Rep. Charlie Davis, R-Webb City.

Krista Stark, executive director of Southwest Missouri Democrats, praised another measure advocated by Davis that allows a resident who is elderly and blind or disabled to possess assets of up to \$2,000 and still qualify for Medicaid. The asset limit for other recipients is \$1,000.

"These are things we worked really hard on, and we appreciate help from our local legislators," Stark said. "Two out of three's not bad. The third is Medicaid expansion, and we're continuing to work on that."