Health Benefits at Risk for Washington's Higher-Ed Part-Timers

Local News

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SEATTLE, Wash. - Action is expected any day now on a measure in the state Senate that higher education advocates say turns the goal of expanding coverage under the Affordable Care Act on its head. AFT Washington President Sandra Schroeder said ObamaCare is designed to extend benefits to those who do not have them. However, she says, a measure pending in the Washington Senate could take existing benefits away from part-timers in the state's higher education system.

"Thousands, literally thousands, of people who work for the state would have their health care benefits threatened," Schroeder said. "Some could actually lose benefits; others might just have decreased benefits at much higher cost. "

The Senate Majority Caucus said its proposal (SB 5905) will produce budget savings for the state. Schroeder pointed out that no studies have been done, so no one knows what the potential cost or savings figures would be.

Part-time instructors at community and technical colleges and state universities would be among the workers hardest hit by the proposed change, she warned.

"If they did that, it would not be saving money in a legitimate way by going after waste, fraud or abuse. It would be saving money by taking something away from people who are working very hard for the state and for the citizens of Washington, for no good reason," she said.

One benefit that has traditionally made up for low-pay for part-time instructors is that they qualify for health benefits once they work 50 percent of a full-time course load, Schroeder explained. If Senate Bill 5905 passes, she said the new definition of who qualifies for benefits could exclude many part-timers entirely.

The legislation is available at http://apps.leg.wa.gov.