

Health exchange to help retirees

As Republicans in the state Senate and Congress and presidential candidates continue to argue that the health care reform law should be repealed, they're dispassionately ignoring how the law can help retirees.

Safe to say that many, if not all, 38,000 Eastman Kodak Co. retirees are fearful that the company will continue reducing or eliminate altogether health care benefits if Kodak gets sold or goes into bankruptcy.

The health care exchanges established under the Affordable Care Act would offer retirees and dependents a viable option for finding affordable insurance, as it would for hundreds of thousands of other retirees nationally who have seen benefit cuts.

State senators could give some peace of mind to area retirees if they would stop dragging their feet about passing legislation that sets up the framework for an exchange. The Assembly already passed such a bill to set up this marketplace of insurance plans for consumers and small businesses.

In the case of Kodak retirees who receive Medicare, the exchange would offer price-competitive options for supplemental insurance. For retirees under age 65, the exchange would fill a void until the retiree is eligible for Medicare.

Kodak retirees would be smart to lobby state Sens. Jim Alesi, George Maziarz, Michael Nozzolio and Joseph Robach to get the state legislation passed soon, which would allow the state to apply for federal funds to help set up the exchange framework.

A lot is unknown about the future of Kodak and the fate of retiree benefits, but the senators could help ease the worry if retirees knew the state was getting its exchange set up.



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