

Don't Expect a Budget Before This Time Next Year

Ross Hunter, Chair of the House Appropriations Committee, continues to warn his fellow legislators that next year he expects a budget standoff to continue through June before it is resolved.

One very small slice of additional federal funding was the featured subject at the Committee meeting on Wednesday in Olympia. The members heard the results of a Public Consulting Group study for the Office of Financial Management. The study looked at issues surrounding the enrollment of residents in state medical and public assistance programs.

With the implementation of federal health care reform, Medicaid enrollment is now split between the Department of Social Health Services and the new state Health Benefit Exchange (HealthPlanFinder). The result is a net reduction in federal matching funds for administration, duplication of efforts, and more confusion for enrollees.

No surprise, PCG is calling for an expanded shared governance structure, and integrated call center and online application routing. Projected costs and savings will not be ready until the study report is completed on June 30, but the savings from these and other recommendations could come to \$5 million per year.

"I am very interested in working on this project," Chair Hunter concluded with a smile.

At the same time a couple members were disappointed that the state has just spent \$200 million in federal funds over the last two years to create this new health care enrollment system, and are already being told it should have been done differently. To the credit of PCG they have attempted to temper their recommendations to minimize costs.

The Committee then heard updates from the Health Benefit Exchange and Health Care Authority. Unfortunately, like most work sessions in Olympia these days there was only time for the agency viewpoints and not alternative perspectives.

To view the PowerPoint presentations from all of the speakers please go to <https://app.leg.wa.gov/CMD/agenda.aspx?mid=20179> .



House Appropriations Committee meets in Olympia on June 18.