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Champaign receives an impromptu visit from Blagojevich

By [Debra Pressey](#)

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CHAMPAIGN - Champaign County Chamber of Commerce President Laura Weis heard Gov. Rod Blagojevich was in town Thursday, but she didn't get a chance to challenge him in person about his gross receipts tax plan that is so reviled by Illinois businesses.

"I wasn't invited," Weis said after Blagojevich sandwiched an unplanned visit to Christie Clinic in Champaign late Thursday afternoon between planned bus tour stops in Decatur and Danville.

Weis said the governor's office had attempted to line up Champaign County businesses to meet with him when the bus tour was being planned, but there weren't any takers.

Christie Clinic officials, who recently agreed to work with the state to take on 3,500 new Medicaid patients, were notified Thursday morning that Blagojevich would be stopping by their Windsor Road branch clinic late in the afternoon, clinic spokeswoman Kelly Schaudt said.

Nurses quickly called patients with late afternoon appointments to warn them there would be a swarm of activity when they arrived, she said.

Christie Clinic Chief Executive Alan Gleghorn said he assumed the governor chose to visit Christie Clinic because the clinic is helping expand health care access to more people.

Blagojevich took the opportunity to thank Christie's doctors and nurses for the work they do and urged everyone to call their legislators to say they support his universal health care plan, called Illinois Covered, and the massive tax that would pay for it.

Blagojevich's health plan would extend affordable health coverage to all state residents, including 1.4 million uninsured adults, and also offer some assistance for middle-income families and small businesses already in health insurance plans.

Illinois children already have access to affordable health insurance through the state's new All Kids health plan.

The governor said that if the state's elected officials can provide health coverage for themselves, it's only fair that they provide it for everyone.

"To me, it's just as simple as the golden rule," he said.

Blagojevich said the number of uninsured Americans has only risen in recent years, and clearly Illinois can't look to Washington to provide affordable health care for everyone.

"That's why I'm determined to get it done in Illinois," he said.

The health care plan comes with a price, Blagojevich said, adding "I wish we could provide this to you for free."

The fairest way to pay for it is by making big business in Illinois pay its fair share, he said.

Blagojevich wants to raise a historic \$7.6 billion through his gross receipts tax plan on business to pay for health care and raise more money for schools.

Businesses that take in less than \$2 million in annual sales would be exempt from the tax, but Weis said everybody - including small businesses and consumers - will wind up paying because the cost of the new tax burden will be passed along.

"There's nothing fair about his plan," Weis said. "It's a noble plan to want to try to expand health care to all, but when the state is in a fiscal crisis, we have to look at how we can cut spending, and not increase spending. That's what businesses do. That's what homeowners do. We cut spending - we don't add to it."

Weis also said the tax proposal is sending the wrong message to economic development prospects looking at Illinois.

"It's going to impact everyone, and I think it's very concerning that we have a governor that is openly challenging business in the state of Illinois," she said.

The local chamber plans to host a town hall meeting on the gross receipts tax at its offices at 8 a.m. April 16.

"We sent the notice out this morning, and we already have 36 businesses signed up," Weis said Thursday.

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