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Informal meeting pushes governor's plan

By Tracy Moss

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DANVILLE – Kim Thompson and her husband paid the health insurance for their adult son, Kyle Thompson, because his employer didn't provide a plan and he couldn't afford an individual one as a chef at The Great Impasta in Champaign.

For that reason and others, Thompson, of Danville, supports Gov. Rod Blagojevich's plan to provide health insurance for the uninsured in Illinois.

She was one of about a dozen people who attended an informational meeting and press conference Thursday afternoon at the Danville Township Building, 101 W. North St. in Danville.

The event was sponsored by the Campaign for Better Health Care and Danville Township and emphasized three reasons the governor's plan should prevail.

Illinois Covered makes economic, medical and moral sense, according to Jim Duffett with the grass-roots organization Campaign for Better Health Care, 44 E. Main St., C.

Duffett told the group Thursday afternoon that this is the year that Illinois health reform must happen, because next year is an election year and by 2009, health insurance costs will have increased even more. If the plan isn't approved, Duffett said another 150,000 to 200,000 working families in Illinois will become uninsured.

When fully implemented in 2011, Illinois Covered will help contain the cost of health insurance for all individuals and businesses, provide coverage to employees whose workplaces are too small to afford an employee insurance plan and create new jobs in the healthcare sector among other benefits, Duffett said.

Blagojevich's plan to provide coverage for the uninsured would be funded by a Gross Receipts Tax that is drawing vigorous criticism from businesses and companies throughout the state.

The tax, as proposed, would tax all businesses in Illinois, regardless of profit margins and expenses, except for those with less than \$2 million in sales. It would pay for healthcare coverage for Illinois adults, increase funding for education and provide money for a capital construction program. It also would replace revenue lost by selling or leasing the state's lottery to pay down pension debt.

Duffett urged people to contact their local legislators and tell them to support legislation for Illinois Covered.

Pastor Fred Cowan of Danville said many members of his church work \$10-an-hour jobs and can't afford health insurance. Roger Boen, supervisor of Danville Township, said he encounters many people through the township programs who cannot afford health care coverage.

But Boen said he's not 100 percent in support of the plan as written. He hopes to see a compromise plan that would be easier on businesses.

"I support all businesses in Danville," said Boen, who added that the township provides business loans up to \$40,000. "I want to see this state move in the right direction. We owe it to the citizens of this state to get something done on healthcare and education."

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