



Written by [Isabel Lyman](#) on April 17, 2011

Okla. Gov. Fallin Rejects Federal Grant for Health Insurance Exchange

Fallin, a former Congresswoman, voted against ObamaCare in the U.S. House of Representatives. She was elected Governor of Oklahoma last November, and though she has continued to express her opposition to ObamaCare, she has also said that the federal legislation is now the "law of the land," that it requires states to set up healthcare exchanges by the end of 2013, and that Oklahoma faces a budget shortfall this year. In her mind, it made sense to accept the federal grant to develop the exchange's infrastructure. (The grant was requested by former Governor Brad Henry, a Democrat.) This, to prevent the FedGov from foisting its own plan on Oklahoma, in the absence of a state plan.



Legislation to create a governing board for the state plan — HB 2130 — was drawn up in the Oklahoma House of Representatives by Speaker Kris Steele (R-Shawnee) and passed by a razor-thin margin. Then resistance came. A funny thing happened to the bill on the way to the Oklahoma State Senate. Its leadership, led by President Pro Tempore Brian Bingman (R-Sapulpa), feared that accepting the big bucks from Washington would wed the state to ObamaCare.

Not only that, but Governor Fallin decided that, instead of accepting the \$54.6 million federal grant, it would be better to reject it.

Activist Charlie Meadows, of Guthrie, Oklahoma, credits the conservative grassroots, having been educated on the issue at hand and speaking against it, with exerting much-needed, bottom-up pressure against taking the money. The measure to do so was never taken up in the Senate. Senator Bill Brown (R-Broken Arrow), Chairman of the Senate Retirement and Insurance Committee, counseled Bingman that accepting the grant would put the state at risk of having the federal government eventually run the exchange.

What to do? Governor Mary Fallin, Senate President Pro Tempore Brian Bingman, and House Speaker Kris Steele pow-wowed together and came up with an agreement that (as described by a [Oklahoma state Senate news release](#)) adds "specific safeguards into the legislation that will prevent the implementation of a federal health care exchange while creating an Oklahoma-based health insurance network." The intent is to satisfy ObamaCare's requirement of establishing an exchange, and do it with state and private dollars. The agreement will create the Health Insurance Private Enterprise Network, which (again quoting from the state Senate release) "will prevent the implementation of a federal health care exchange ... and increase access to affordable, private, portable health insurance plans through a free-market based network that offers choice and competition to consumers."



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According to Bingman: "This is Oklahoma's solution and federalism at work." A board will oversee the program, chaired by Insurance Commissioner John Doak.

Activist Meadows applauds the turnabout by Fallin and Steele, but warns that the citizenry must stay vigilant to determine if the state network proves problematic, in which case it can be eliminated if ObamaCare goes down in flames. Adds Meadows: "We must watch for any amendments which might harm the intent of the new legislation as it proceeds through the process."

Isabel Lyman blogs at <http://thecastillochronicles.blogspot.com/>

Photo: Gov. Mary Fallin



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