

Prescription drug bill gets boost in House - Morning Sun, The (Pittsburg, KS) - February 23, 2000

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TOPEKA (AP) -- A bill that would set up a program to help senior citizens pay for prescription drugs received a House committee's endorsement Tuesday.

The Health and Human Services Committee approved the bill on voice vote. Committee members are counting on \$100 million in federal money to help finance a senior service trust fund, which would in turn pay for prescription drugs for elderly Kansans.

The bill went to the House for debate.

Gov. Bill Graves announced last week that the Department on Aging had found a way to obtain the extra funds, in theory for payments to nursing homes for taking care of seniors. However, other states have used the extra money for other purposes.

Graves is proposing that the state place money in the seniors' trust fund. The fund would generate nearly \$3.8 million in interest earnings during its first year.

Rep. Carlos Mayans, R-Wichita, the bill's primary sponsor, said cooperation from Republicans and Democrats will be necessary to pass the legislation. He said the state will have to reassess its priorities if the extra federal funds are not available.

"I think the funding is going to be there," he said. "I think there will be more money available from interest."

Rep. Ed McKechnie, D-Pittsburg and a House Appropriations Committee member, said Graves' proposal to use the extra federal funds for a prescription drug program is among the most significant initiatives the governor has proposed.

"I think the money's solid," McKechnie said.

The Department of Aging found a way to bring the federal money to Kansas after at least four other states took similar actions to lure federal dollars to their states.

Sixty percent of the extra \$100 million will be placed into the seniors' trust fund. The money also could allow legislators to increase the budgets of public schools by \$50 for the 2000-01 school year. It also would provide funds for special education programs.

"I think the priorities we had were identified before the money was available," Mayans said. "Now we have the opportunity to fund identifiable priorities."

Under the bill, an individual would have to be 67 to be eligible for the program, which would begin next year. In 2003, the age of eligibility would drop to 65.

Individuals would have to earn less than \$14,000 a year by themselves or be part of a household earning less than \$16,000 a year. The program would pay up to \$1,500 in drug costs, with participants picking up 30 percent of each prescription.

Prescription drug bill is HB 2814. Bills are available on the Internet at www.ink.org/public/legislative/fulltext.cgi.

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