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2011 Legislative Wrap-up: Lots of Drama; Few Results

I have good news and bad news regarding the 2011 State Legislative Session and women. The good news is a lot of bad bills died. The bad news is a lot of good bills died.

First let's look at what Colorado women were spared:

- ▶ A roll back of recent health care coverage for families by repealing the hospital provider fee, which brings matching federal funds.
- ▶ A challenge to the federal health care law which extends health care coverage to most of the uninsured by 2014.
- ▶ Requiring that people applying for public benefits, in addition to bringing their government I.D., produce their original social security card (rather than their number) before getting help.
- ▶ Changing the Pay Day Loan finance fee (one of three fees on pay day loans) from a prorated fee to a nonrefundable origination fee, increasing the cost of loans of less than 30 days to 289% APR.
- ▶ Diversion of law enforcement resources into federal immigration law enforcement.

On the other hand, Colorado women missed certain opportunities:

- ▶ Adding teeth to our current employment anti-discrimination laws.
- ▶ Allowing lesbians to gain state level rights and responsibilities equivalent to marriage through civil unions.
- ▶ Allowing Colorado high school graduates without legal immigration status a chance to further their education at rates only slightly higher than other Colorado residents.

There was enough bipartisan support to take some steps to improve access to health care. The Legislature gave the go ahead to form the governing structure to develop a state health care exchange. By 2014, individuals and small businesses will be able to find and compare health care coverage through a single website. They can also find out if they qualify for a public program or premium subsidy. The Legislature also took steps to insure that children can continue to get individual health insurance policies. The Legislature also streamlined Medicaid coverage by setting a single eligibility level for Medicaid (133% of Federal Poverty Level- \$29,726 for a family of 4) for pregnant women and children of all ages. The federal health care law provided the financial incentive to do this. The legislature also eliminated the requirement that school based health centers not waive copayments and deductibles. Together, these bills move Colorado forward in getting health care available for people who need it.

Still awaiting action on the Governor's desk is one measure which is a big step in the opposite direction. Initially presented as part of the budget package, a proposal passed to dramatically increase the premiums for Child Health Plan coverage for families who earn 205% - 250% of the Federal Poverty Level (between \$44,700 and \$55,875 for a family of four). About 20% of children in this group are expected to drop out if the premium increase goes through. In actuality, the proposal does not save money, only jeopardizes children's health.