

Sacrifice is called key to Rendell's health proposal

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In town to promote Gov. Rendell's ambitious and controversial health-care plan to members of the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, Rosemarie Greco urged her early-morning audience to make some sacrifices.

The plan's multipronged approach is dividing interest groups, said Rendell's director of health-care reform, but the state will be able to improve health-care access, affordability and quality if everyone gives up "something that we hold dear for the common good."

Doctors, hospitals, insurers and businesses all have criticized aspects of the plan, which seeks to provide coverage for thousands of uninsured Pennsylvanians, give health-care providers other than doctors wider responsibility, reduce medical errors, and improve care for people with chronic illnesses. The plan, known as Prescription for Pennsylvania, includes provisions to subsidize insurance coverage for workers at small, low-wage companies

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and to tax companies that do not offer their employees insurance by 3 percent of payroll.

“We have definite critics of pieces of Prescription for Pennsylvania, and that says we did something right, I think,” Greco told about 125 business leaders at the University of Pennsylvania.

The state House of Representatives has begun addressing aspects of the proposal in various bills rather than as a cohesive whole. Health care is now competing for legislators’ attention with the governor’s budget and transportation issues.

Greco said that she expected some bills to move through the House this month, but that they probably would not reach the Senate until fall.

At the meeting, Mark Schweiker, president of the chamber and former Republican governor, said health-reform legislation “takes a long, long time” and he “couldn’t handicap” how the legislation would do this month. He said Rendell had an ambitious legislative agenda that would be difficult to push through. “These are big, big lifts,” he said.

While the chamber has not officially taken a position on

the Prescription for Pennsylvania, Schweiker said small businesses wanted more details about what the plan would cost them. Until then, he said, they’re in “watching and waiting mode.”

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