

Sparring over health care

Republicans say taxes would rise, Dems say not so

BY MICHAEL GORMLEY

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ALBANY — Senate Republicans on Tuesday said a Democratic proposal to create single-payer health care could quadruple the average Long Island family's state income tax, a claim that Democrats rejected as they declared they will not raise taxes if they take control of the Senate.

Republicans are fighting to keep the Senate majority that they've held for most of a half-century, but are within one seat of losing control of the 63-seat State Senate. And nearly a dozen races in the Nov. 6 election are too close to call.

Republicans contend a Democratic Senate proposal introduced for the last two years that promises health care for all New Yorkers would result in \$139 billion in new spending for the state. By comparison, the total state budget is \$168.3 billion. The Republican analysis claims an average Long Island family would pay about \$21,000 a year in state income taxes, compared with about \$7,000 today.

Yet how the controversial system would or could work is far from certain. For example, Senate Republicans are assuming the entire cost of the program



Senate Majority Leader Flanagan says the Democrats' plan would "bankrupt" Long Island families.

would be paid through state income taxes with the full cost paid annually. But paying for the health care plan solely through income taxes is unlikely, experts say, and the cost could be eased by spreading the cost over payroll taxes and fees and over several years.

The nonprofit RAND Corp., an independent think tank, in August said the single-payer plan would insure 1.1 million more

New Yorkers, reduce unaffordable premiums and copays for 18 million more, and result in a net savings for 90 percent of New Yorkers, although wealthier residents would pay far more under new progressive income tax rates, according to the study.

"Senate Republicans are the last bastion of hope for our taxpayers who cannot afford disastrous Democrat policies like AlbanyCare," said Senate Majority

Leader John Flanagan (R-East Northport). "Just one Democrat policy alone, government-run health care, would bankrupt families on Long Island."

Republicans have blocked the New York Health bill for two years, but the measure pushed by the Democratic minority conference isn't necessarily what the Democratic majority would pursue, said Senate Democratic spokesman

Mike Murphy.

"Like the majority of New Yorkers we understand the skyrocketing costs of health care, but this attack is nothing but GOP fearmongering and scare tactics not based in reality," Murphy said. "The Senate Democratic majority will not raise taxes."

Republicans are using the RAND estimate of \$139 billion in added cost for the government health care program. The state income tax that now ranges between 4 percent and 8.82 percent would rise to 10 percent for the first \$27,000 of household income and would be 18 percent for income more than \$27,000 and less than \$141,000. Income over \$141,000 would be taxed at 27 percent, according to the study.

About 80 percent of the net added cost would be paid by employers, with 20 percent of workers seeing an increase, according to the study.

Small employers would be required to provide health insurance, which business groups claim would shutter small companies operating on a slim profit margin.

Other obstacles are in the way, too. The Republican Trump administration has said it won't provide necessary waivers for the program. Powerful lobbyists, including hospitals that are often the biggest employers in communities, also would exercise their considerable clout in any deliberations.

Touro Law looks to boost pass rate for bar

BY KESHIA CLUKEY

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Touro Law Center officials are working on improvements to the school's law program after more than half of the graduates who took the July bar exam failed, according to a letter sent by the school's dean to alumni.

The pass rate for Touro graduates who took the state bar exam for the first time was 48.6 percent, Harry Ballan, a law professor and dean of the Touro College Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center in Central Islip, wrote in an Oct. 24 letter to alumni.

"This is not acceptable," Ballan wrote in the letter provided

to Newsday by the college. "The faculty and I have begun to implement extensive reforms involving changes in the classroom, curriculum and culture of the school. We expect these changes to be reflected favorably in future results."

Touro had 105 candidates take the exam for the first time, according to the college.

Officials from the approximately 500-plus student law school declined to comment on the score and efforts being undertaken.

The passing rate for the 5,497 graduates of American Bar Association-accredited law schools that took the exam for the first

time in July was 83 percent, according to data released Oct. 23 by the New York State Board of Law Examiners. And 81 percent of graduates from New York ABA schools passed the exam, according to a news release.

The state exam is typically given in July and February, and the passage rate of first-time test takers is used as a standard for accreditation purposes. The New York State Board of Law Examiners provides passage rates by institution to the individual schools, but does not release them publicly.

The Touro Law Center and Hofstra Law are the two law schools on the Island, both of

which are accredited by the ABA.

Hofstra had 187 first-time takers take the state bar exam in July, with a passage rate of 62 percent, according to the university. Of the 196 first-time candidates who took the July 2017 exam, 70.4 passed, according to a report published by the news website Above the Law.

"As dean, my leadership approach is to think in terms of a multiyear strategic plan, and one of my very highest priorities remains to increase and maintain the bar passage rate," Judge Gail Prudenti, dean of the Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra, said in an

emailed statement.

Touro's July passage rate dropped 16.2 percentage points, from the 64.8 percent of 108 first-time candidates who took the exam in July 2017, according to the Above the Law report.

"We will be re-examining in detail everything we do, in and outside of the classroom, to investigate the causes of these results and to assure that the continued implementation of reforms, from evidence-based teaching to curricular reform, is successful," Ballan wrote. "We will continue to work relentlessly for the success of our students. We own it; we'll fix it."