Rigby solon lauds new indigent care measure

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State Rep. JoAn Wood, R-Rigby, said although the newly-passed indigent medical care bill falls far short of perfect, it will greatly help counties with such heavy costs.

Rep. JoAn Wood

Mrs. Wood, a member of the House Health and Welfare Committee, who took a leading part in revising the bill, said it particularly would help such a county as Bonneville which had had heavy costs.

"This bill limits counties to 72 percent of the cost," she said. "In Bonneville's case which had $500,000 in claims, it would save about $150,000."

She explained the costs vary among hospitals but in the Idaho Falls Consolidated Hospitals, the federal agencies pay 72 percent of what the counties and hospital patients pay.

She also said it sets up a system for relatives to help pay for indigent care although it is not mandatory.

"In view of the circumstances and what we have had to face, this is a wonderful bill," she said.

The Idaho Association of Counties drew up the bill which allows counties to pay the federal discounted charges and try to recoup at least a portion of each bill from the patient. It also exempts counties from the freeze imposed by the 1 Percent Intiative.

Mrs. Wood said it also may enable counties to avoid issuing tax warrants to pay the outstanding bills.

Also important, it eliminated the "regular" cost, so that the counties will be paying Medicaid rates.

In Bonneville, $172,000 indigent medical budget for fiscal year beginning Oct. 1 has been exhausted. The county has approved $191,000 in claims but has no money to pay them. Another $272,000 in claims is pending.

She and Chuck Holden, executive director of county association, agreed last year's law which set up a catastrophic insurance fund system did not work and failed to attract any county for participation.