

WASHINGTON (AP) — Supreme Court Justice ...

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Medicaid for the middle class?

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama's health care law would let several million middle-class people get nearly free insurance ...

The change would affect early retirees: A married couple could have an annual income of about \$64,000 and still get Medicaid, said officials who make long-range cost estimates for the Health and Human Services department.

After initially downplaying any concern, the Obama administration said late Tuesday it would look for a fix.

Up to 3 million more people could qualify for Medicaid in 2014 as a result of the anomaly. That's because, in a major change from today,

most of their Social Security benefits would no longer be counted as income for determining eligibility. It might be compared to allowing middle-class people to qualify for food stamps.

Medicaid chief actuary Richard Foster says the situation keeps him up at night. "I don't generally comment on the pros or cons of policy, but that just doesn't make sense," Foster said during a question-and-answer session at a recent professional society meeting.

"This is a situation that got no attention at all," added Foster. "And even now, as I raise the issue with various policymakers, people are not rushing to say ... we need to do something about this."

Administration officials said Tuesday they now see the problem. "We are concerned that, as a matter of law, some middle-income Americans may be receiving coverage through Medicaid, which is meant to serve only

the neediest Americans," said Health and Human Services spokesman Richard Soriano. "We are exploring options to address this issue."

Administration officials and senior Democratic lawmakers initially defended the change, saying it wasn't a well-meaning effort to simplify the rules for deciding who would get help under the new health care law. Instead of a hodgepodge, there would be one national policy.

But Sen. Orrin Hatch of Utah, the ranking Republican on the Senate Finance Committee, called the situation "unacceptable" and said he intended to look into it.

Governors have been clamoring for relief from Medicaid costs, complaining that federal rules drive up spending and limit state options. The program is now one of the top issues in budget negotiations between the White House and Congress. Republicans want to roll back

They have weakened safety standards for decades to keep the nation's commercial nuclear reactors operating.

Medicaid is a safety net program that serves more than 50 million vulnerable Americans, from low-income children and pregnant women to Alzheimer's patients in nursing homes. It's designed as a federal-state partnership, with Washington paying close to 60 percent of the total cost.

Early retirees would be a new group for Medicaid. While retirees can now start collecting Social Security at age 62, they must wait another three years to get Medicare, unless they're disabled.

Some early retirees who worked all their lives may not want to join a program for the poor, but others might see it as a relatively painless way to satisfy the new law's requirement that most Americans carry health insurance starting in 2014. It would help tide them over until they qualify for Medicare.

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More cigarette warnings are not new in world

By ELLEN GIBSON AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK — While graphic new labels on cigarette packs that a diseased lung or rotting teeth are shoeing to U.S. consumers, in countries from Egypt to Italy may ask: "What's the big

already require warnings as graphic as the new U.S. labels — if not more so.

The U.S. warnings — the biggest change to the labels in 25 years — use mostly fear and disgust to discourage Americans from smoking. The FDA estimates the new labels will cut the number of smokers by 213,000 in 2013, with smaller additional reductions through 2031. While it's impossible to attribute reduced smoking rates to any single cause, in Canada, Brazil,

Michael Cummings, chair of the Roswell Park Cancer Institute's Department of Health Behavior.

"We're a third world nation when it comes to educating the public on the risks of smoking."

on a rotating basis. They have until the fall of 2012 to comply.

Before the new labels were introduced, the U.S. had some of the weakest cigarette warnings in the world. The introduction of the graphic labels was required in a 2009 law that, for the first time, gave the federal government authority to regulate tobacco.

Food and Drug Administration, to any single cause, in Canada, Brazil,

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swirling nearby and a sewn-up course. They will take up the entire top

warning labels stating, "Cigarettes may be hazardous to your health," in

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CORRECTIONS If you spot an error that significantly changes the meaning of any Tribune news story, call the city editor at 250-8247.

TIMES: Members of the Western Writers of America will sign books from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Friday at Barnes & Noble. The time for event was incorrect in a story on Page 1B on Tuesday.

NORTH DAKOTA LOTTERY WWW.LOTTERY.ND.GOV POWERBALL Saturday: 12-21-22-38-41 Powerball: 18 Power Play: 2 Jackpot: \$36.7 million MEGA MILLIONS Tuesday: 11-24-25-31-46 Mega Ball: 17 Jackpot: \$64 million HOT LOTTO Saturday: 4-8-12-25-29 Hot Lotto: 6 Jackpot: \$1 million WILD CARD Saturday: 3-6-7-26-28

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