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TAXES – HEALTH INSURANCE TAX

Issue:

Farmers and ranchers have two major concerns related to health insurance: cost and access. The new Health Insurance Tax (HIT Tax) increases health insurance costs for farmers, ranchers and other small businesses by imposing a levy on the net premiums of health insurance companies. This additional cost is passed on to consumers who obtain their health insurance through the fully insured market.

Background:

The HIT Tax was passed as part of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA). It has nothing to do with reforming the health care insurance system but was included in the ACA as a way to raise revenue to offset the cost of the legislation. The HIT Tax, which is an excise tax levied on a health insurance company's net premium, raised \$7 billion in 2014, the first year the tax was collected.

Most farmers and ranchers and other small businesses are not self-insured because they do not have a large enough pool of employees. Instead, small employers purchase health insurance in the fully insured market. Because fully insured health plans are the only plans that factor into the equation that determines how much HIT Tax an insurance company pays, the cost of the HIT Tax is being passed through to small businesses that purchase those plans.

This new tax is pushing insurance costs even higher than they already are, making it harder for farmers and ranchers to purchase coverage for themselves, their families and their employees. A Congressional Budget Office (CBO) report confirms that the HIT Tax "would be largely passed through to consumers in the form of higher premiums for private coverage." A study by former CBO Director Douglas Holtz-Eakin indicates that the anticipated impact is as much as three percent-nearly \$500 a year per family.

Legislative Status:

S. 183, the Jobs and Premium Protection Act, introduced by Sens. John Barrasso (R-Wyo.) and Orin Hatch (R-Utah) and H.R. 928, the Jobs and Premium Protection Act, introduced by Reps. Charles Boustany (R-La.) and Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.) t repeal the HIT tax. Farm Bureau supports.

AFBF Policy:

Farm Bureau believes that one of the primary goals of health insurance reform should be to reduce costs. Farm Bureau opposes the HIT tax.