

WASHINGTON - Rep. Lee Terry, R-Neb., introduced his version of health care legislation on Tuesday.

Terry's bill would create a health insurance system similar to the health benefits program that covers members of Congress and federal workers, but the new system would be open for anyone to purchase insurance through it.

Terry described the new system as an identical twin to the existing benefits program, although there is at least one major difference.

Members of Congress and federal employees have most of their premiums paid for by the government, just like many private sector employers do for their workers. Members of the public who went out and purchased their own insurance through the new program would have to cover the full cost of the premiums.

Terry said the administrative cost of his plan would be the same as that of the federal employee benefits system - about \$15 million a year.

He said his legislation is both far simpler and far cheaper than the Democrats' health care proposals that are moving through Congress.

Terry has talked previously about providing federal subsidies to help people on the margins who can't afford the premiums in the new program that would be established, but ultimately decided to leave those out of the bill introduced Tuesday.

"That could be the next phase that we deal with," Terry said in an interview. "Let's get the structure set up."

Terry said he expects that health insurance plans offered in the new program would be affordable because participating insurance companies would be competing against one another for customers' business. He also said that the new program would allow for larger pools of people, which would bring down costs.

His plan would allow employers to opt in with the same tax benefits that employer-supported insurance plans now enjoy. The plans in the new program would be required to take on customers regardless of pre-existing conditions during the initial enrollment phase.

