



The fine print on those ObamaCare fines

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There's new information on fines in ObamaCare, but one critic of the law says people don't necessarily have to pay the penalty.

The federal government requires virtually everyone living in the U.S. to have some form of health insurance or qualify for one of the exemptions offered. Those who choose to go without may have to pay a tax penalty, which is up for the 2015 year compared to 2014.

According to H&R Block, many people who went without health insurance last year are seeing finer more than double under the Affordable Care Act. The average fine among customers who owe a penalty is \$383, compared with \$172 in 2014.

Michael Cannon, director of health policy studies at the Cato Institute, says it's similar to what happened last year, only worse.

"A lot of people are paying fines, [and] they're paying higher fines than they were last year – and a lot of people are having to pay back subsidies that they're not entitled to receive." Cannon explains. "The worst parts about this are that you don't even have to pay those fines if you structure your taxes correctly – and yet people are still paying those fines."

Cannon says it is something the Obama administration hasn't been transparent about in recent years.

"They can't assess fines on people who fail to pay the ObamaCare mandate tax, they can't use liens against your property, [and] they can't use criminal penalties," he says. "They can seize your refund and apply that towards your ObamaCare mandate penalty, [but] other than that all the IRS can do is send you a sternly worded letter saying ... *You need to pay this.*"

The Obama administration continues to tout the success of the Affordable Care Act, saying millions of Americans have enrolled in online marketplaces, while others are getting coverage for the first time and the percentage of uninsured Americans is falling. Still, Cannon and other policy analysts say the administration is claiming success over something it wants people to have in the form of health insurance, while warning them of a penalty if they go their own way.