Incoming Fla. House Speaker picks executive-legislative fight over health care

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Incoming House Speaker Dean Cannon sent Gov. Charlie Crist a letter Tuesday telling him to back off implementation of the federal health care law unless state lawmakers give him the go-ahead.

Cannon, R-Orlando, accused Crist of "commandeering of state insurance regulatory resources" by allowing executive agencies to begin implementing the federal law even as State Attorney General Bill McCollum, a Republican, is challenging the law in federal court.

Cannon was especially critical of the Office of Insurance Regulation, which is overseen by Crist and the Florida Cabinet, because it has started developing data systems necessary to enforce the law.

Both Crist's and OIR Commissioner Kevin McCarty's offices said they were reviewing Cannon's letter.

Cannon's letter gave Crist until Nov. 15 to provide him an accounting of all state agencies' activities related to implementing the law and said Crist will need the legislature's approval before taking any further action.

Kevin Wagner, a Florida Atlantic University political science professor, said Crist and the Cabinet as the executive branch of government are under no obligation to obey Cannon's legislative orders.

"It is a little bit of overreaching on his part," Wagner said of Cannon. "But it's good politics."

He said it was a political jab at Crist, an independent candidate for the U.S. Senate, two weeks before the election.

"The health care bill is relatively unpopular. It's an easy target for Republicans to pin on Charlie Crist," he said.

But Cannon's staff said this is a matter of the state's health care policy and the state constitution names the legislature as the policy making arm of state government.