

Faith leaders publicly lobby for Medicaid expansion

By [Joseph Walker](#), Deseret News

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<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865591008/Hospital-association-supports-Medicaid-expansion-for-low-income-Utahns.html?pg=all>



The Revs. Scott Dalgarno and Catherine Putnam-Netto with Wasatch Presbyterian Church hold signs during the Utahns for the Medicaid Expansion rally in the rotunda at the state Capitol on Wednesday, Nov. 20, 2013, in Salt Lake City. The group rallied to show Gov. Gary Herbert he has support if he decides to expand Medicaid.

SALT LAKE CITY — More than 100 Utah clergy members signed an open letter to Gov. Gary R. Herbert asking the governor to “lead us in finding the way to expand Medicaid that fits Utah and reaches the thousands of our neighbors who are in desperate need of medical care.”

The letter, complete with the names and congregational affiliations of 110 Utah clergy members, appeared as a full-page ad in last Sunday’s editions of the Deseret News and Salt Lake Tribune. It also appears in Wednesday’s editions of the two Salt Lake City-based newspapers.

A source at Media One, which handles advertising for both newspapers, indicates the cost of the ad was \$12,146.25. A note at the bottom of the ad indicates the Episcopal Diocese of Utah paid for it.

“The message comes from our hearts,” said the Rt. Rev. Scott B. Hayashi, Episcopal bishop of Utah, in explaining his church’s sponsorship of the letter, adding that “we received 110 signatures in three days time from throughout the state.”

“Fifteen different faith groups are represented,” he continued. “Thus there is broad support across the religious communities of Utah.”

What those religious communities support is “the expansion of Medicaid to provide health care coverage to some of our most vulnerable neighbors,” according to the [published letter](#).



“As the state commissioned Public Consulting Group study showed, expanding Medicaid in Utah could ultimately assist 123,586 adults who would otherwise be uninsured,” the open letter said. “Providing this assistance would ensure that thousands of Utahns have access to preventative care and are able to receive medical attention before their situation becomes catastrophic.”

[Herbert has indicated](#) he is “weighing the options” to come up with “a Utah solution” to Medicaid expansion, which is an option under the

Affordable Care Act. A full expansion of the program would provide funding for about one-third of the state’s 370,000 uninsured citizens — but at considerable cost to Utah taxpayers.

“The governor wants to make the right decision for Utah that strikes a proper balance between helping the most vulnerable residents and being responsible with the taxpayers’ dollars,” said Ally Isom, deputy chief of staff, in an email response to a Deseret News request for comment on the full-page ad by Utah religious leaders. “The decision-making process set forth by the governor has been deliberative and inclusive. He is reviewing the Medicaid expansion options presented at the Governor’s Health Summit and working with legislators to ensure the right decision is made for the people of Utah.”



None of which is lost on the religious leaders.

“We want the governor to know that we sincerely appreciate his careful deliberation and his listening to those who have had meaningful conversations with him over the need to help more than 120,000 of our neighbors,” Bishop Hayashi said. “We respect what we know to be a very thoughtful time of reflection for him.”

Still, the Episcopal leader added, “we want him to know that there are many who will stand beside him if he is able to come up with a Utah way to make this work.

“We know there is no ‘cookie cutter’ approach to Medicaid expansion, and there would need to be some modifications here and there to fit Utah’s needs and desires,” Bishop Hayashi continued. “We appreciate that Utahns have a history of compassion, and as members of the community of faith, we see Medicaid expansion as a part of that heritage.”