

# Governor Gary Herbert says no to Medicaid expansion, offers alternative to fill the coverage gap in Utah

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SALT LAKE CITY, Utah (ABC 4 UTAH) - A third option is now on the table for lawmakers to consider in the debate over expanding Medicaid in our state. Governor Gary Herbert officially rolled out his plan Thursday afternoon.

The plan actually doesn't expand Medicaid. It's an alternative, a Utah solution as he calls it to bridge the gap for thousands of Utahns going without

care.

"I'm convinced today that the best pathway forward for Utah is not to pursue an expansion of the federal Medicaid program," said Governor Herbert.

Instead the governor is pursuing a federal block grant for a three year pilot program.

The Healthy Utah Program, as it will be known will provide coverage for 111,000 Utahns making less than \$15,500 a year. Participants will get plans through the private market, share in the cost, and parents with children on Medicaid will be able to cover the entire family on the private plan.

"Utah can do more with less, if the federal government will just block grant us the money, take away the strings and give us maximum flexibility, we will find innovative ways to do things better," said Herbert.

The governor says it's Utah's solution to full Medicaid expansion. Meeting four values he has been touting, those who can work do work, expanding the private sector, maximizing flexibility with the federal government and respecting the tax payer.

Advocates for full Medicaid expansion are confident the discussion is heading in the right direction.

"I think there are a lot of good ideas in this plan and frankly there is a lot of good ideas in the senate plan and some good ideas in the house plan," said Matt Slonaker with Utah Health Policy Project.

The governor still needs to successfully petition the federal government to sign off on this plan, but he's confident based on a recent trip to Washington DC.

"The president told me, the last thing he said was we're looking for more flexibility, if you've got a better way to do things come and talk to me about it," said Herbert.

Perhaps the biggest opposition to the governor's plan could come from right here at home. Speaker Lockhart's proposal is waiting to be heard on the house floor and Senator Brian Shiozawa's passed committee this morning. Utah's solution will hinge on the governor, house and senate working together and agreeing on one plan.

