

Delay is not good for anyone

Link: <http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/opinion/57512249-82/medicaid-expansion-utah-full.html.csp>

February 09 2014 - 10:23 pm

Officials throughout the executive and legislative branches of Utah state government are contorting themselves into all kinds of uncomfortable knots in an embarrassing attempt to avoid doing the right thing.

Efforts to justify anything other than a [full expansion of state Medicaid benefits](#), as envisioned by the original Affordable Care Act, demonstrate how blind our leadership is to the facts and to the [expert advice](#) it has paid for and is coming from its own medical experts.

Those facts are that full expansion would save lives, save jobs and save money for Utah government, business and families.



But the one thing full expansion wouldn't save would be the storyline adopted by so many Utah elected officials, the one that says that the federal government can't do anything right and, even if it could, the country doesn't have the money.

This is all John Roberts' fault. Because the U.S. Supreme Court couldn't bring itself to leave alone the law known to friend and foe alike as Obamacare, a key part of the scheme's precarious balance was taken out. That element, which would have required states to expand their Medicaid programs to cover households earning up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level, was made optional by the chief justice's majority opinion in last year's Obamacare decision.

The result has been confusion and misery for the working poor and political gridlock for elected officials, at least in the many Republican-controlled states where the full expansion of Medicaid has been rejected or, as in the case of Utah, is still being fussed over.

In his recent State of the State address, Gov. Gary Herbert referred to that judicially created gap, one that helps the very poor and the relatively affluent as it abandons so many working poor, as a "flaw" in the ACA.

It's a flaw he could immediately fix by agreeing to fully expand Medicaid, as was envisioned in the law before the Supreme Court messed it up.

Herbert is studying the matter, having only rejected the option of "doing nothing." House Speaker Becky Lockhart, already gearing up to challenge Herbert in 2016, responds by absurdly accusing Herbert of being an Obamacare lackey.

Everyone else just keeps dithering, even as a new study from Harvard University demonstrates that the difference between full expansion and anything short of that will [literally cost lives](#), tens of thousands of lives across the states that reject the ACA and the federal money that goes with it.

It would all be funny if it weren't so, quite literally, deadly.