

Medicaid expansion

Feb. 20, 2014 |

At times, this board has questioned Gov. Gary Herbert's thought process as it relates to federal programs being used in Utah's borders. But we have absolutely no arguments with his logic on whether to accept more than \$500 million in federal money for Medicaid aimed at insuring people living below the poverty line.

Earlier this week, House Republican leaders, including House Speaker Becky Lockhart, unveiled their plan for the health insurance proposal. Their idea is to reject \$524 million in federal money to help insure 111,000 low-income Utahns and instead spend \$35 million in state funds to cover an unknown number of people.



Two key points have to be considered:

- This money is going to be spent anyway. It comes from taxpayers across the nation. If it's going to be spent anyway, then the money might as well be put to use here.
- This is a chance to obtain more than \$500 million to provide real help for Utahns in need.

Those two points make it logical for the state to participate in the Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare.

We understand the philosophical point of view of Lockhart and others who believe Utah should take a stand for fiscal responsibility. But we have to question the thought process of those lawmakers as to how they think this stand will turn out. If Utah doesn't take the money, it may make a political statement, but it will have done nothing to help Utahns in need.

As Herbert said, "There is a moral obligation we have ... as a state and government to help those people."

The circumstances may have been different if the state was flush with cash. But despite being among the best-managed states in the nation, we can't fund our schools adequately. Now GOP leaders in the House want to take on funding Medicaid at the state level as well? The result is fairly easy to predict — fewer people being covered at a higher cost paid exclusively by Utah taxpayers.

We understand the uncertainty. Medicaid expansion is not an easy decision. Money promised by Washington, D.C., now may dry up and become an unfunded mandate. That's certainly a risk, but it's one that is worth taking to help the most needy among our Utah residents.

Utah should take part in the expansion and accept the federal funds