

# Session Ends with No Medicaid Decision, Talks Continue

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Another Utah legislative session has ended without a decision on Medicaid, but Governor Gary Herbert and healthcare advocates are declaring a victory of sorts.



Late in the session, Governor Herbert came out with his long-awaited proposal to get health coverage for Utah's poorest citizens. He wants to use federal dollars to buy private coverage for low-income Utahns, but he first needs approval from the federal government. He asked state lawmakers not to limit him with any legislation that would hinder negotiations with the feds.

"That's the good news, that didn't happen, nobody tied my hands. In fact, the Senate in many ways embraced my specific plan," Herbert says.

But the House refused to consider the Senate-endorsed plan. Speaker Rebecca Lockhart has said throughout the session that she does not want to accept any federal dollars to expand Obamacare in Utah, and she maintains that position. But the governor says if he can get his proposal approved by the feds, he expects the legislature to embrace it. House Majority Leader Brad Dee is noncommittal.

"It's premature to say that we'd vote for any deal for any negotiation that he might have. We haven't seen it. If he goes back to make another deal, let's look at it," Dee says.

Healthcare advocates say the process is not over, but they are optimistic that a solution to the so-called coverage gap is coming. RyLee Curtis is a Medicaid analyst for Utah Health Policy Project.

"We didn't have any legislation passed that said Utah will not expand Medicaid, and that is a huge win. We were very close to that last year. You know, we're in a way better position this year than we were last year at the end of the legislative session, and that's a win in itself too,"

The governor says that if he is able to strike a deal in DC, he will call a special legislative session to consider it.