

Our View: Legislative Medicaid tiffs

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Editorial Board

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Utah political observers, as well as scores of thousands of Utahns without health care insurance, have a ringside seat to a health care fight between the Utah House and Senate over Medicaid.

The House, championed by Speaker Becky Lockhart, favors a lean, mean solution that would allow some coverage -- not too great, mind you -- for tens of thousands of Utahns who will not get health care if Utah does not join the Obamacare Medicaid option. The cost is maybe \$30 million, maybe more. The Senate likely plans a version in which Utah will accept Obamacare Medicaid money, as long as our state can wave goodbye to the funding requirements if we change our mind in a few years. This option would allow about \$500 million in fed money to go to Utah for Medicaid expansion.

Utah Gov. Gary Herbert, who outlined a three-year \$258 million "Healthy Utah" plan on Thursday that would seek block grants, is closer ideologically to the Senate plan. The Senate proposal, authored by Sen. Brian Shiozawa, R-Cottonwood Heights, also seeks to get the Medicaid recipients into private health insurance.

Both Herbert and Shiozawa envision a state-directed plan that would hope to cover as many Utahns as a federal Medicaid expansion.

While the Senate plan offers a closer version of Obamacare, it may be rejected by the Obama administration's Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius. HHS has been stingy in allowing Utah options to conventional Medicaid funding.

As we have editorialized in the past, Utah should accept the administration's offer for Medicaid funding as it is outlined. It makes sense to get tax dollars back, particularly since Obamacare is a costly plan for states. However, both Herbert's "Healthy Utah" and the Senate plan are a lot better than the House plan, which should be quickly eliminated. It's ridiculous to deny uninsured Utahns decent health care insurance when the money is there to provide.

Also, the Obama administration should bend a little and accept a Utah plan in line with the governor's and the Utah Senate. Obamacare was a flawed bill passed in haste. It's very unpopular among Americans, including those uninsured. If Utah passes a bill that insures those in need, it should be accepted by Sebelius.