

# Gov. Herbert: Still work to do to sell Medicaid expansion alternative

By [Lisa Riley Roche](#)

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SALT LAKE CITY — Gov. Gary Herbert acknowledged Thursday he still has a lot of work to do to win approval of his proposed Healthy Utah alternative to Medicaid expansion from both the Obama administration and the Utah Legislature.



But the governor said he continues to believe he can put a plan in place by the end of summer to provide health care coverage for some 110,000 low-income Utahns.

"That's my hope. Again, it's an aspirational goal. The sooner the better," Herbert said during his monthly news conference on KUED Ch. 7. "But we've clearly got some negotiations yet to do with the Obama administration," as well as state lawmakers.

Herbert said no agreement was reached about his plan during a meeting with Senate President Wayne Niederhauser, R-Sandy, after Wednesday's party caucuses.

The Legislature's GOP majority expressed no interest Wednesday in dealing with Medicaid expansion in what would likely be a single-day special session, preferring to wait until the 2015 Legislature begins in late January.

The governor said lawmakers have had little to discuss while he and his staff are negotiating for control of the \$258 million available for Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act, known as Obamacare, for his state-run plan.

"The Legislature is not involved. They're waiting for me to deliver a product," Herbert said.

The plan he announced during the 2014 Legislature has yet to be approved by Washington, especially a provision requiring recipients to work.

Herbert said he is scheduled to meet again in Washington with outgoing U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius and her staff in June on the work requirement, a concept he said most Utahns support.

At that point, the governor said, he hopes to have a plan ready for lawmakers to consider.

"I understand the concern that they need to do their own due diligence," Herbert said. "They will have processes where they can have it vetted themselves, maybe some committee hearings before we would ever call them into special session."

Asked about a new report released Wednesday by FamiliesUSA finding that two-thirds of Utahns without health insurance have held a job in the past year, the governor said he wants to study it further.

"It's not a matter of being fair," he said in response to the impact the time it's taking to get approval for his plan is having on the uninsured. "It's a matter of doing what's prudent and fiscally responsible."

An April BYU [poll](#) released Thursday found a majority of Utah voters support some version of Medicaid expansion, with the governor's plan favored by 43 percent and the original expansion under Obamacare by one-third.

Only 13 percent said they preferred no change, and 11 percent liked a proposal backed by House Speaker Becky Lockhart, R-Provo, a possible challenger to the governor in 2016, to use state funds to provide limited insurance coverage.

At Thursday's news conference, Herbert also said no decision has been made about appealing the recent ruling by U.S. District Judge Dale Kimball that Utah must recognize same-sex marriages performed here before a stay was issued in the Amendment 3 case.

The governor praised Kimball for putting his order on hold for 21 days. When U.S. District Judge Robert Shelby rejected Utah's voter-approved constitutional ban on gay marriage last December, the state had to go to court for a stay.

Herbert said he will be briefed by Attorney General Sean Reyes and the legal team hired by the state to see how Kimball's ruling "dovetails in with our overall goal of defending Amendment 3 and the constitution of Utah."

The governor said he believes states have the right to define marriage, but the issue won't be settled until the U.S. Supreme Court weighs in. Utah's case is currently before the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals, which is expected to rule soon.

Herbert said he is "dismayed by the voices out there that want us to stop in the middle of the process because they think the polling numbers are different or that mores have changed, or some other reason."

If that's the case, laws can be changed through the legislative process, he said.

"This is a new day. I understand that and mores may be changing. But we have a law on the books that needs to be defended," Herbert said.