

# Medicaid Spared in Gov Budget, but will Legislature Follow Suit?

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Dec 05, 2008 by Elizabeth Ziegler

(KCPW News) The budget Governor Jon Huntsman proposed yesterday assumes Congress will move quickly to send fiscal relief to the states to bolster Medicaid. And Utah Health Policy Project's Judi Hilman says that's a safe bet, which could help maintain services for Utah's most vulnerable population. But, the governor's budget could face challenges in the Legislature.

"Some legislators have said, well that's just temporary relief. We can't count on it. We have to cut Medicaid anyway. Not true, if you consider that broader context of Congress and this administration's willingness to tackle health system reform."

Hilman says Medicaid must be preserved and even expanded to meet the 10 percent growth in people seeking help. She sees Medicaid as the essential foundation to Utah's health reform process, because it offers affordable health care. Increasing affordability is one of the three components of the state's health system reform effort. The other two address quality of care and accessibility.

Incoming Senate President Michael Waddoups ranks health care as one of his top priorities for this next legislative session. But, he acknowledges that Medicaid might wind up on the chopping block.

"We'll do Medicaid funding the best we can. But if we have to cut back in education, if we have to cut backing transportation, there's a very strong likelihood we may have to cut back in public services to those on Medicaid or other public service programs," Waddoups says. "You can't have a significant cut-back in revenues and not have everybody feel part of it."

And like Hilman and other health advocates, Senator Waddoups is looking to Congress for help solving the health care crisis. He says health reform will come primarily from the federal government, not Utah.