

Gov. Reaches Deal on Health Care; Legislature Awaits

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The last blockade preventing more than 100,000 Utahns from obtaining health insurance will be the Utah State Legislature.



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This deal, known as the Healthy Utah Plan, would accept hundreds of millions of dollars in federal cash to insure the state's poorest people.

The plan differs from outright Medicaid expansion by funneling that taxpayer money to private insurance companies and charging recipients higher premiums and co-pays. In some instances, Herbert's plan would also require recipients to be employed—efforts that he says would force people to have more “skin in the game.”

“I think this is significantly better than the alternative of Medicaid expansion,” Herbert said, adding that he believes the Healthy Utah Plan will provide “more choice,” and “better access” to health care.

While the hard-fought approval from the Obama administration is good news for Utah's uninsured, the largest obstacle may be the Utah State Legislature.

Throughout the year, Herbert pledged to call a special session of the legislature to hasten the process. But with the upcoming holiday season and a 30-day public comment period that must occur once the plan is finalized, Herbert says he's no longer interested in calling a special session.

“I'm taking the special session off of the table,” he said.

This means lawmakers will tackle the issue during its general session, which commences Jan. 26.

Although Herbert says he's confident his plan will win favor with the public and the legislature, it is likely to face strong opposition from conservative lawmakers opposed to taking any federal money to provide health care.

Herbert says the concessions he's won from the Obama administration on his plan are "more flexible than has been given to any other state in the country."

But to win this flexibility, roughly 111,000 uninsured Utahns have been left hanging in the balance while more than \$200 million in funding paid out by Utahns to fund health care has remained in Washington. This money, Hebert acknowledged, is lost.

"There's no question that there's some money that we've paid that we can't recoup," he said.

Same-Sex Marriage

Herbert also addressed the decision by the U.S. Supreme Court to not hear same-sex marriage cases, which earlier this month amounted to a wholesale victory for equal rights advocates.

The governor, who has staunchly defended Utah's Amendment 3, which banned same-sex marriage, said it was "mistake" for the Supreme Court to not take on the issue.

"I think it's left people unsatisfied on both sides of this issue," he said.

Any fears that legalized same-sex marriage might erode traditional marriage or wreak havoc on the state's moral and governmental fabric, have not materialized.

Asked by a reporter if he's heard any problems from state agencies in regard to how same-sex marriages have impacted the state, Herbert said he has "not heard any complaints or problems."

Tags: [Gary Herbert](#), [Health Utah Plan](#), [Image](#)