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By [Lisa Riley Roche](#), Deseret News

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Gov. Gary Herbert says Utahns will reject outside group's attack on Healthy Utah

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SALT LAKE CITY — Gov. Gary Herbert said Utahns won't be swayed by a [Florida-based group's attempt](#) to stop his proposed Healthy Utah alternative to Medicaid expansion.

"I think the people of Utah and our Legislature are smart enough to reject that kind of outside influence," the governor said Thursday during the taping of his monthly news conference on KUED Ch. 7.



The Foundation for Government Accountability, which has set up a website, [UnhealthyUtah.com](#), and sent out mailers, is trying to "distort" his plan to provide health care coverage for low-income Utahns, Herbert said.

The foundation's research director, Jonathan Ingram, responded in a prepared statement: "It's a shame that Gov. Herbert doesn't want a comprehensive discussion of his plan to expand Obamacare in Utah."

Ingram said, "It's telling that he is unable to debate the actual policy and instead criticizes our geography. If he doesn't want taxpayers outside of Utah to discuss his Obamacare expansion plans, he shouldn't demand taxpayers everywhere pay for it."

Herbert said he wants debate "to be truthful" over his plan to use the \$258 million available to the state under the Affordable Care Act, known as Obamacare, to help those Utahns purchase private insurance.

"I don't think it's right for somebody from outside of Utah to come in and try to direct, for whatever their political purposes are, and distort what we're trying to present here to the Legislature and the people of Utah," the governor said.

Asked what the conservative foundation's motivation for taking on a Republican governor might be, Herbert said it's clear they don't like President Barack Obama's signature health care law.

"Guess what, this may not be a news flash to you but may be to them — I don't like it, either," he said. "I feel like I've been given lemons as do many states, and I'm trying to take those lemons and make as best a lemonade as I can out of them."

After the taping, Herbert told reporters he doesn't know nor does he care why the foundation has targeted his Healthy Utah plan.

"I don't know what it is. They didn't come consult with me. It's a Florida agenda. It's whoever the Florida people are and whoever knows what's behind it. I don't know. I don't really care. I'm focused on getting it done in Utah," the governor said.

Herbert has already countered a [critical post](#) to the Forbes.com website from the foundation about Healthy Utah in a lengthy, point-by-point [rebuttal](#) on his blog of what he called "half-truths and blatant misrepresentations."

The foundation is a non-profit and does not have to report who is backing the effort. And because it is not advocating for or against either a candidate or a ballot issue, the foundation does not have to register with the state.

Herbert said he met Wednesday at the Governor's Mansion with the newly elected House and Senate leadership and will present his plan to the Legislature on Dec. 4, at the next Health Reform Task Force meeting.

Last session, retiring House Speaker Becky Lockhart, R-Provo — a possible challenger to Herbert in 2016 — fought his plan. Now, the governor said, there's an opportunity to have "new eyes, a new perspective, the willingness to work together."

House Speaker-elect Greg Hughes, R-Draper, has already said he agrees with the governor that doing nothing about Medicaid expansion during the 2015 Legislature that begins meeting in late January is not an option for the state.

Some 60,000 Utahns earning below the federal poverty level are in a so-called coverage gap and won't qualify for subsidies under Obamacare unless the state accepts some form of Medicaid expansion.

With the GOP taking control of the U.S. Senate, Herbert said it's time for Congress to work in a bipartisan way to fix the problems with Obamacare. If they don't, he said, it would be a mistake that could cost Republicans the White House in 2016.

A formal agreement with the Obama administration is "pretty much" there, the governor said, as waivers from the federal government are being finalized so a contract can be drafted.

Also Thursday, the governor said a [recent poll](#) showing a majority of Utahns believe the state's liquor laws are hurting economic development comes at a time when tourism is growing and the business climate is earning national praise.

"We're probably our own worst critics here in Utah," Herbert said. "I think the laws by and large have worked very well. Utah is not as peculiar as some places in the south or Pennsylvania, so it's not unique."

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