

Gov. Herbert promises Dec. 4 debut for Healthy Utah details

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Gov. Gary Herbert says his administration will share his Healthy Utah Plan — hammered out in months of negotiations with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services — with Utah lawmakers on Dec. 4.



That's the next meeting of the Legislature's Health Reform Task Force and the venue choice of House Speaker-elect Greg Hughes, R-Draper, and Senate President Wayne Niederhauser, R-Sandy, for rolling out the plan, the governor said at his monthly news conference Thursday.

Healthy Utah is the governor's alternative to expanding traditional Medicaid, as was envisioned by Obamacare. It would help tens of thousands of low-income Utahns earning up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level who are not covered by Medicaid buy private health insurance plans.

The plan is not a simple thing to digest, however.

"We'll have a printed booklet — right now it's about 25 pages long — for them (lawmakers) to distribute as they see fit," Herbert said.

The governor took shots at a Florida group, the Foundation for Government Accountability, that is running an online petition for Utahns who oppose the governor's alternative to Medicaid expansion. The petition is at the website unhealthyutah.com.

The group is distorting his plan and ignoring the fact that he, too, opposes the Affordable Care Act, Herbert said.

"We lost in court.... I feel like I've been given lemons, as do many states, so I'm trying to take those lemons and make the best lemonade I can out of them," he said.

"This is a group that doesn't even know how to pronounce Tooele or Duchesne or Hurricane and yet are trying to tell us what to do with our desire to have an alternative to Medicaid," Herbert added.

A blog post on the governor's website refutes points made by the Florida foundation.

But Jonathan Ingram, director of research for the foundation, said Thursday that Herbert should debate the actual policy instead of grumbling about where the foundation resides.

"If he doesn't want taxpayers outside of Utah to discuss his Obamacare expansion plan, he shouldn't demand taxpayers everywhere pay for it," Ingram said in an emailed statement.

Ingram also said that one of the first things the newly Republican-dominated Senate and House will do is look to reduce enhanced Medicaid expansion funding.

"Gov. Herbert is pinning his hopes on the false promise of 'free' federal funding that everyone agrees won't be there."

In his KUED press conference, the governor also said he hopes the Obama administration learned from last year's poor rollout of HealthCare.gov, and that the second enrollment period, which starts Saturday, is smoother.

"It's had some modicum of success in Utah from the standpoint of the 80,000" who signed up for healthcare coverage, Herbert said.

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