



## Our View: Support Healthy Utah plan

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Standard-Examiner Editorial Board

Link: <http://www.standard.net/Our-View/2014/12/09/Our-View-Support-Healthy-Utah-plan.html>

Gov. Gary Herbert is to be commended for working out Utah's alternative to blanket Medicaid coverage for scores of thousands of residents who fell through the cracks of the Affordable Care Act. Legislators would be foolish to reject or tinker with Herbert's plan, which followed extensive negotiations with the federal government.

Herbert's Healthy Utah plan provides access to Utahns who cannot receive subsidized coverage from the ACA. The feds offered hundreds of millions of dollars in Medicaid subsidies to states to handle the coverage shortfall, but many states, including Utah, have been wary of expanding Medicaid, fearing heavy costs even with promised subsidies. It's certainly open to debate whether Governor Herbert should have simply accepted hundreds of millions of dollars in Medicaid funding, but the reality is Utah political leaders were not going to go for it. Healthy Utah is the best alternative.

Besides garnering a healthy share of the money it would have received from the feds via Medicaid expansion, it also has better features. There are real efforts in Healthy Utah to encourage work and eventual self-sufficiency among health care-expansion recipients. With Healthy Utah, time limits on coverage can be implemented, and it comes with a work program to help the unemployed find jobs. It is an acceptable alternative to Utah simply taking a large amount of cash and being dictated to by federal regulations. Without Medicaid expansion, or the Healthy Utah alternative, Utah would continue to pay into a costly health care reform system and get little in return.

The ACA is a mediocre law. It achieves more coverage at heavy expense, particularly to the middle class. It's a huge cash cow for major insurance companies. The ACA broke a cardinal rule of legislation, which is not to make things worse for a significant number of Americans. Nevertheless, the law is likely to survive, albeit with -- we suspect -- several revisions over the next decade. It's smart for Utah to get as many persons covered with as much autonomy as the state can have. Healthy Utah achieves that.