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Let the Games Begin! 'Healthy Utah' to be Unveiled Thursday

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30 November 2014.

Posted in [Today At Utah Policy](#)

On Thursday, Gov. Gary Herbert will make one of the most anticipated announcements of his tenure in office as he takes the wraps off the “Healthy Utah” plan.

It seems like only yesterday that House Speaker Becky Lockhart was vowing to block any Medicaid expansion with Herbert announcing he would come up with a “Utah solution” to the problem, but that was way back at the beginning of the year.



Jason Stevenson with the Utah Health Policy Project says Thursday’s announcement has been a long time coming.

“This issue has been floating on the Hill for a long time. The Health Reform Task Force has been considering this topic for a couple of years,” says Stevenson. “Everyone realizes this is one of the big issues coming up in the next session.”

Herbert has been negotiating with the Obama administration to get what he calls “maximum flexibility” in implementing his alternative to Medicaid expansion. The result is what he plans to announce on Thursday morning.

Earlier this month Herbert said [at his KUED press conference](#) he is hoping he will be able to work with lawmakers to pass his plan by the end of the 2015 session which begins in January.

“There’s always the opportunity to have new eyes and a new perspective on this to find a solution. Doing nothing is not an option,” said Herbert. “I feel like I’ve been given lemons and I’m trying to make lemonade as best as I can that’s fair to the taxpayer.”

What may complicate things as “Healthy Utah” moves forward is the Florida-based Foundation for Government Accountability has started a campaign against the plan. They’ve even hired a lobbyist, meaning they will have a presence on the Hill during the session.

Stevenson says he’s not too worried that FGA will get traction during the session.

“I’d like to take their stock photo websites and scare language and stack that against real Utahns who can testify in front of lawmakers. People know this problem exists here in Utah. This is a real issue that deserves our attention.”

FGA led the charge against the “Healthy Indiana” plan put forward by Republican Gov. Mike Pence. That plan [recently won approval](#) for another year from the feds. Stevenson says he expects the group to have a similar lack of success.

“Utahns know these guys are sound and fury with not a lot of substance. Stock photos only get you so far.”

The Health Reform Task Force [meets at 9 am on Thursday](#).