

Governor Sets July 31 Deadline for Deal on Medicaid Expansion

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Gov. Gary Herbert, along with legislative leadership, announced Thursday afternoon the decision on Medicaid expansion will be put off for another few months.

Herbert told a packed press conference that he would continue working with legislative leadership after the session ends to find a solution. They'll be joined on the "gang of six" by Sen. Brian Shiozawa, R-Cottonwood Heights, Rep. Jim Dunnigan, R-Taylorsville and Lt.

Governor Spencer Cox. The committee is setting a deadline of July 31 to come up with a solution. That will be followed by a special session.



"It's become clear to me and my colleagues we're not going to find a solution in the session that's going to be satisfactory to all," said Herbert. "The two biggest issues we're facing are finding a way to make this (Medicaid expansion) sustainable and predictable. We will work amongst ourselves. We are within sight of a solution. We are just running out of time."

"What we are saying is all the conversation has not been had," said House Speaker Greg Hughes, R-Draper. "We are not going to regurgitate old points of view. We are going to move forward and not quit just because we reached an artificial end point."

It became clear Thursday morning that the roadblocks to a deal were too great to break through by the mandated end of the session Thursday at midnight. Shiozawa said failure to reach an agreement was not due to a lack of trying.

"I spent so much time in the Speaker's office; I thought he was going to put a nameplate on the door for me. We had some very productive talks."

The decision to continue on in the process could be seen as a face-saving measure for House and Senate leadership. Even though they are leaving the Hill without a decision on Medicaid expansion, they are leaving with something. And something is better than nothing.

However, moral victories aren't much comfort to those Utahns left in the coverage gap. They'll have to wait until maybe July for a solution - then the state will have to get a waiver from the federal government for any plan they come up with.

"Depending on what the plan is, it could be implemented quickly," said Dunnigan. "We would plan to have a quick transition."

The group making that decision on Medicaid expansion consists of all Republicans with nary a Democrat in sight. Is the lack of participation by the minority party an oversight?

"We will have an ongoing discussion with the Democrats," said Herbert. "We will talk to a lot of people. We won't exclude the minority party from this discussion."

What will happen on this issue remains to be seen. There's a looming Supreme Court decision over whether subsidies under the Affordable Care Act are constitutional. If the court rules against that, it could change Utah's equation dramatically. That decision isn't expected to come until May or June.

RyLee Curtis, Senior Policy Analyst at the Utah Health Policy Project said in a press release statement, "It is disappointing that our legislature could not enact a coverage gap solution this session, but we have confidence in our leaders to fulfill the process they've set forth to come to an agreement. The need is urgent. Every few days a Utahn will lose their life due to lack of access to health care, and every day the state of Utah is losing \$800,000 of taxes that we've already paid."

"I don't want to predict the outcome," said Herbert. "We are within sight of the goal. I am very optimistic we are going to find a Utah solution for this. We will find resolution