

## Editorial: Utah Medicaid saga a poor example of state leadership

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Congratulations to Gov. Gary Herbert as he becomes chairman of the National Governors Association. It is a testament to his stature among peers that he now leads the non-partisan organization of 55 governors from states, territories and commonwealths.

Herbert [talks about state government](#) as the place where solutions to national problems are found. The example he cites from his own state? Medicaid expansion.

Sorry, Governor. That's a bad example. Utah has taken far too long to cover more of its poor residents, causing unnecessary suffering, preventable deaths and wasting money that Utahns have paid into Medicaid only, so far, to get nothing back.

While progress on expansion was made last week, recent history tells us that much can go wrong. And we don't have it yet.

That it has taken three years and counting to resolve this issue is not Herbert's fault. He's worked overtime on finding an answer, but has been met by a Legislature intractably unwilling to have anything to do with President Obama's much needed overhaul of health care.

Just over one year ago, Herbert returned from a trip to the White House, which had agreed to Healthy Utah, his plan to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, and gain coverage for up to 126,500 people. A pumped up Herbert proclaimed the negotiations a "win, win, win all the way around."

Lawmakers didn't see it that way. Public outrage forced House Speak Greg Hughes to even grant a hearing to consider Herbert's plan.

Last week's possible breakthrough came after lawmakers heard from relatives of people who have died while waiting for action. Carol Frisby developed fatal colon cancer because the state's Primary Care Network — health insurance for the poor — is so wantonly inadequate that it won't pay for a common colonoscopy, which had been prescribed by her doctor.

Now, the plan is for the state's 10 percent share of Medicaid expansion to come from hospitals, clinics and other health care providers, hardly an original idea as tapping providers always has been part of Obamacare, which was passed by Congress five years ago.

So now, Herbert is touting this new plan hatched by the Gang of Six — a group of state lawmakers and officials charged with moving the ball — as the sort of innovation that makes states "the laboratories of democracy."

After the frustrating debacle of the last three and a half years — of lawmakers unable or unwilling to pay for health care for the most vulnerable among us — we hope the plan is implemented soon.

But an example of Utah ingenuity? No.