

My view: Expansion of health care access benefits everyone

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Recently, the debate regarding any version of Medicaid expansion has devolved into personal attacks and questionable arguments. Claims have been made that this is an onerous tax on health-oriented businesses that will pass the costs to sick Utahns and will result in patients bearing a greater burden. The potential of death from not seeking medical treatment is the greater burden.

The proposal is to increase the taxes on doctors, hospitals and drug companies who will financially benefit from medical insurance expansion since they will get more revenue from more patients. A medical insurance expansion will ensure that everyone who might be threatened with disease will quickly seek medical treatment and not wait until the issue becomes much worse and results in a significantly higher cost to the patient, their family, nearby individuals and the government.

A legitimate function of government is to ensure the safety of its citizens. That is why we tax and spend for police and for military defense. A vigorous government health plan decreases the chance of disease spreading and threatening citizens. The

proposal is to ensure that bank accounts of patients are not depleted (medical care bills are a major reason for bankruptcy applications).

Despite claims that this is an expansive and socialist entitlement program, this proposal is similar to the effort to develop and buy the F35 fighter that many claim to be even more wasteful. It is interesting that the F35 fighter project will probably save a lot fewer lives than increased access to health care. Disease threatens and restricts liberty more than any government. The massive debt and spending track that we are on is mainly due to the popular demand that our military be powerful to ensure our physical safety.

Education, roads and other infrastructure are paid for with our taxes and managed by government because everyone benefits. Despite arguments to the contrary, education decreases the long-term cost to society of uneducated citizens. Thomas Jefferson had some pretty good arguments about that. The same arguments apply to roads, postal service and other infrastructure. Future generations benefit even more from these government services. Wise public policy demands that we provide respectful and reasonable access to health care.

The idea that the cost of maintaining the health care of citizens will result in a higher cost is like the argument that maintaining roads will result in a higher cost. Regular maintenance of roadways significantly reduces the long-term cost of roads. We maintain our cars for the same reason.

Our crime rate will continue to increase without access to the health care expansion's drug and alcohol and mental health treatment. Over 70 percent of incarcerated individuals would benefit from such an expansion and recidivism would decrease. Also the homeless problem can be significantly helped with an expansion.

Responsible government should protect the safety of its citizens, whether it is through law enforcement, fire protection, safer roads, a vigilant public health system, a powerful military or access to health care. Expansion of health care access benefits everyone and is a legitimate responsible and respectful function of government.

George Chapman is a former candidate for Salt Lake City mayor.