

My view: Medicaid expansion deserves recognition, as it is 'the right thing to do'

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The Journal of Health Affairs estimated that over 102 of our Utah neighbors died in 2013 because they couldn't afford health care. Another 1,600 Utah women couldn't afford mammograms that same year. As many of us know, Utah refused to accept the federal money that was available to us to cover 72,500 impoverished Utahns in a plan to expand Medicaid. That is federal money that you and I provided by paying our taxes.

Gov. Gary Herbert, Lt. Gov. Spencer Cox, Senate President Wayne Niederhauser, House Speaker Greg Hughes, Sen. Brian Shiozawa and Rep. Jim Dunnigan put aside strong rhetorical arguments and courageously came together in a humanitarian effort to help the tens of thousands of our hard-working neighbors with whom we work and socialize, live near and sit next to in church, school and on TRAX. I was overjoyed as one of over 100 religious leaders who also put aside our differences to unite for Medicaid expansion over the last several years.

Additionally, business and health stakeholders have agreed to discuss how to fund this expanded Medicaid program over and beyond federal funds. They will profit from expansion, the people will profit and the state will profit. The legislative leaders, religious leaders and businesses all agree it's the right thing to do. To me, that is the most important argument. It always was the right and good thing to do. Therefore, it is also my "right and good thing to do" to offer thanks and blessings for such actions of statesmanship.

Imagine trying to pay for health care if you are below 100 percent of the poverty level. The poverty level for a single person is defined by a yearly salary of \$11,770. The Washington Post wrote how a typical broken arm costs \$8,000. That is nearly 80 percent of a poverty level salary. No wonder people die rather than get treated. Add in a family of four and the poverty level is an annual salary of \$12,125. Assuming that family never eats or pays rent, that salary would still not pay for one simple operation. Tragically, thousands of Utahns do not have to imagine that; it is their reality.

Combining health stakeholders and federal funds is a unique solution to stop the hurting and the dying. Uniqueness is not a new concept in Utah. We know how to share, how to help our neighbors and how to be creative. We also know a good deal when we see one. This puts our state in the forefront. We already have low unemployment. Now we can also have a healthier workforce and low uninsured rates. Economists join health officials in detailing how important that is for us all.

It seems so logical, moral, economic and again, simply the right thing to do. Yet there are those arguing that our prosperity lies in denying care through insurance that we have already paid for in taxes. I further argue how can we have prosperity if our workforce isn't healthy. I hope and pray that when our

Legislature convenes again, our lawmakers show the rest of our country that there is “the Utah way” to make things work, just as our legislative leaders have shown us in coming together this summer.

Again, thanks to Gov. Herbert and the leaders of the Senate and House. I ask that all of us make sure their work is recognized and passed for the sake of all of us, especially our neighbors who continue to live in the shadows of our health care system.

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