

Poll: Utahns Aren't Sure Lawmakers Will Find the 'Right' Solution on Medicaid Expansion

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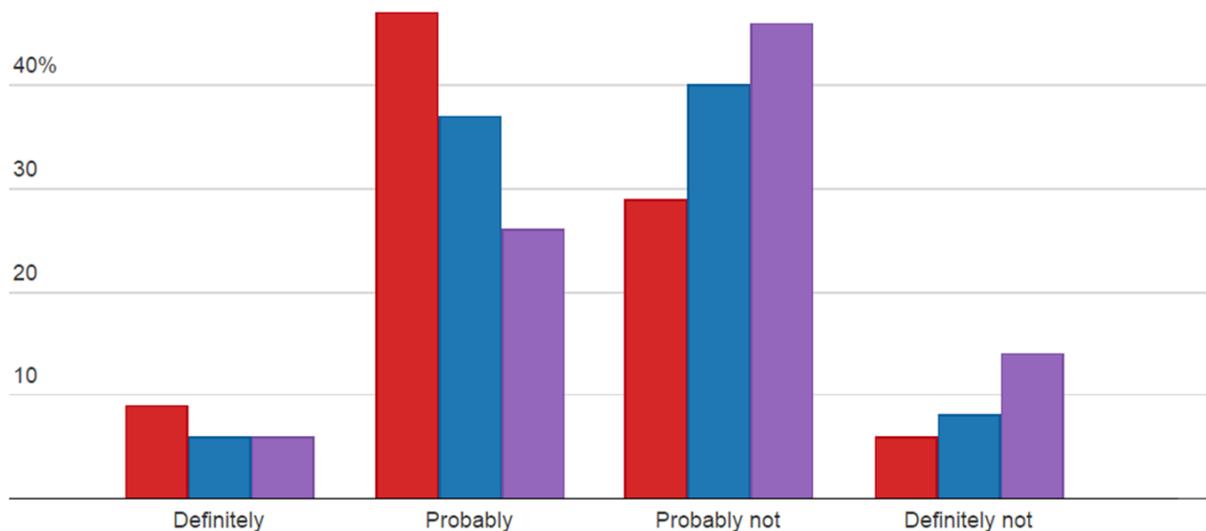
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Link: <http://utahpolicy.com/index.php/features/today-at-utah-policy/6934->

Do you believe that lawmakers will still be able to come up with the right Medicaid expansion plan that fits Utah's needs?

(Political affiliation)

■ Republicans ■ Democrats ■ Independent voters



Source: UtahPolicy.com

Utahns are split over whether the state Legislature can come up with a “right” plan to expand Medicaid to help low-income citizens, a new UtahPolicy poll finds.

Pollster Dan Jones & Associates found that 47 percent of Utahns “definitely” or “probably” believe the lawmakers can find a solution to Medicaid expansion under Obamacare.

But 42 percent say they can’t find the “right” Utah-based solution. Nine percent don’t know.

Utah House Speaker Greg Hughes told UtahPolicy that at least citizens are not “over-expecting” from the Legislature.

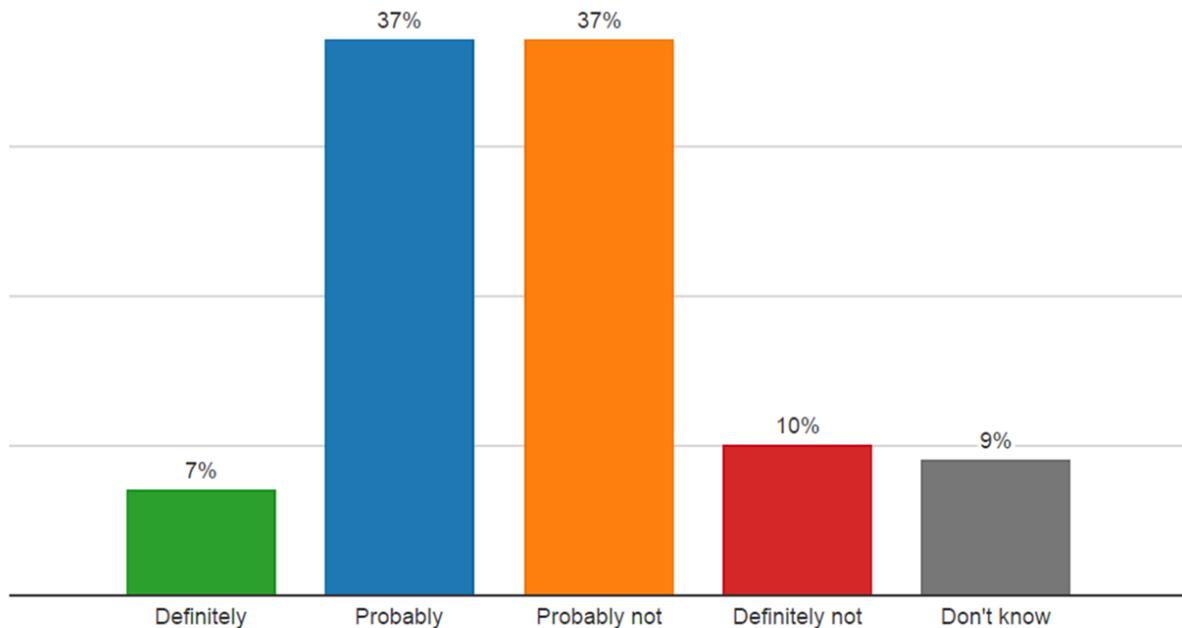
“I would rather have lower expectations, and then deliver – because I believe we will deliver,” said Hughes after being told of the poll results.

As UtahPolicy readers probably recall, GOP Gov. Gary Herbert, after months of study and the help of an independent group, came up with his [Healthy Utah](#) plan, which took advantage of the federal government’s promise to pick up to 90 percent of the overall cost of expansion.

But House Republicans in the 2015 Legislature refused to go along with it. (The Senate passed HU.)

Do you believe that lawmakers will still be able to come up with the right Medicaid expansion plan that fits Utah’s needs?

Survey conducted by Dan Jones & Associates, August 7-14, 2015. 500 adult Utahns. Margin of error +/- 4.99%



Source: UtahPolicy.com

Instead, House Republicans came up with a plan that morphed into Utah Cares – which did not provide extended coverage to those making more than 100 percent of the federal poverty line.

Here is a previous UtahPolicy [poll](#) comparing the two plans.

After the Legislature had adjourned doing nothing on Medicaid expansion, Herbert named a six-person, all-GOP committee – dubbed the “Gang of Six” – to work out a compromise.

The Gang includes Herbert, Lt. Gov. Spencer Cox, Hughes, R-Draper, Senate President Wayne Niederhauser, R-Sandy, and other GOP legislative leaders.

The Gang recently announced that they have a framework for a compromise – which takes the state to 138 percent of poverty – Obamacare’s requirement.

But instead of the state picking up the other 10 percent, Hughes told UtahPolicy recently, Utah-based health care professionals – hospitals, doctors, druggists, etc. -- will pay the 10 percent copay since the health care industry will be making more money through the expansion.

The Salt Lake Tribune recently [reported](#) that some healthcare industry executives may be balking at paying those new “fees” – especially if the state can’t, or won’t, cap the industries ultimate liability.

In any case, Herbert says he will call a special legislative session before year’s end to act on the Gang’s recommendation.

But Jones’ new poll finds Utahns aren’t convinced a solution is at hand.

Some poll numbers:

- Among Republicans, 56 percent say their party state leaders can come up with the “right” Medicaid expansion plan.
- 35 percent – more than a third of Republicans – don’t think so, with 9 percent don’t know.
- Only 43 percent of Democrats think the Legislature can find a deal, 48 percent say no, and 8 percent don’t know.
- It’s the political independents who are skeptical – 60 percent say lawmakers can’t find a Medicaid expansion deal, 32 percent believe they can, and 8 percent don’t know.

While Medicaid expansion in Utah is not fundamentally a religious issue, a number of local religious leaders have formally endorsed Herbert’s Healthy Utah plan – which went to 138 percent of poverty and would have covered more sick, low-income Utahns.

Leaders of the LDS Church did not formally endorse HU, although they encouraged legislators to work on a solution to help those suffering among us.

Jones finds that 52 percent of “very active” Mormons believe lawmakers can find a solution, 38 percent don’t, and 9 percent didn’t know.

Skepticism among non-Mormons is much greater: Only 37 percent of Catholics say the Utah Legislature will find the “right” Medicaid expansion plan, 63 percent of Catholics say lawmakers will fail.

Sixty-two percent of Protestants said lawmakers will fail on Medicaid, and 58 percent of those who said they have no religion say Utah lawmakers will not find the “right” solution for Medicaid expansion.

Notice that the naysayers don't say no solution will be found; they just don't believe the "right" solution for Utah will be found by the GOP-controlled Legislature.

Speaking to UtahPolicy about the new poll numbers, Hughes said he believes that sometime in October the Utah House Republicans will meet in an "all hands on deck" caucus – "likely closed, so that we can hash this out, learn all the details."

Hughes says there's little doubt that some House Republicans will oppose the final compromise – because at their hearts they just don't believe the state should enter into another expanding entitlement program.

There are 63 House Republicans. Thirty-two are a majority of the majority caucus, and Hughes says he wants at least that many Republicans voting for the plan – or he won't feel comfortable going forward.

When Healthy Utah passed the state Senate in the 2015 Legislature, it took several Democratic votes to reach a 15 majority.

Hughes doesn't want only a minority of House Republicans voting for a plan – that passes with Democratic votes to reach a passing majority of 38.

"I think this will be the best chance" of Medicaid expansion ever passing in Utah, said Hughes.

Of several arguments in favor of the Gang of Six compromise, Hughes said a big one is that it will protect public education budgets.

Each year the GOP majority in the Legislature comes into general session hoping they can fund new student enrollment growth in public schools.

But it is not a given, said Hughes.

Healthy Utah or some other version of Obamacare Medicaid expansion takes money off the table before there are any other budget decisions – which could impact public education spending.

"I don't see why" public education advocates inside and outside of the Legislature "don't see that. But it's true."

"Our (Gang of Six) plan solves that problem."