

Editorial: Lawmakers trick doctors into killing health care access

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Members of the Utah Legislature never have shied from turning their backs on the state's poor and working class. They do it all the time, on everything from school spending to tax policy.

But when the state's business, religious and medical establishments lined up behind Gov. Gary Herbert's Healthy Utah plan, an inferior but serviceable alternative to the expansion of Medicaid under the federal Affordable Care Act, there was hope that the unconscionable lack of access to health care for low-income Utahns would finally be addressed.

It should be very difficult, with that array of well-placed supporters, for lawmakers to yet again deny to so many of us that basic component of a civilized life.

But it is beginning to look as though one should never underestimate the cruelty of Utah's elected leaders. The impossible, as they say, just takes a little longer.

After months of secret dickering over the details, the so-called Gang of Six, a small assemblage of worthies from the executive and legislative branches, came forth with yet another alternative plan they dubbed [Utah Access Plus](#).

There isn't a lot of difference between the two. Sen. Karen Mayne, a West Valley City Democrat, called the new plan "Healthy Utah with a hat on." But that hat might better be described as an executioner's hood. Consistent with their paralyzing fear that the state would actually have to contribute some of its own money to draw down millions of federal dollars in a nine-to-one match, the new plan would access some \$50 million a year in taxes and fees against the state's medical-industrial complex.

It is a reasonable idea. The many millions that would flow through the new system would greatly benefit hospitals, doctors, pharmacies and the like in the form of more patients, particularly more patients who can pay their bills.

For some doctors, the cost would be less than [two months' lease on their BMWs](#). And Senate President Wayne Niederhauser, a member of the gang, reasonably suggests that those fee hikes could be reduced or eliminated for doctors who provide charity care.

But those fees, together with [the decision](#) by House Speaker Greg Hughes that the plan will only move forward with a majority of Republicans supporting it, add up to, excuse the horrid pun, a poison pill. It is a plan to deny health care access to maybe 126,000 Utahns even as it punishes the medical profession for having the nerve to back Healthy Utah. It lets lawmakers blame the thoroughly predictable opposition from health care providers for the Legislature's own dismal failure to do its job.

The lengths to which Utah lawmakers will go to disgrace themselves, and their whole state, never cease to amaze. And never end.