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Op-ed: Politics obscures just how many Utahns the Affordable Care Act has helped

By Jason Stevenson

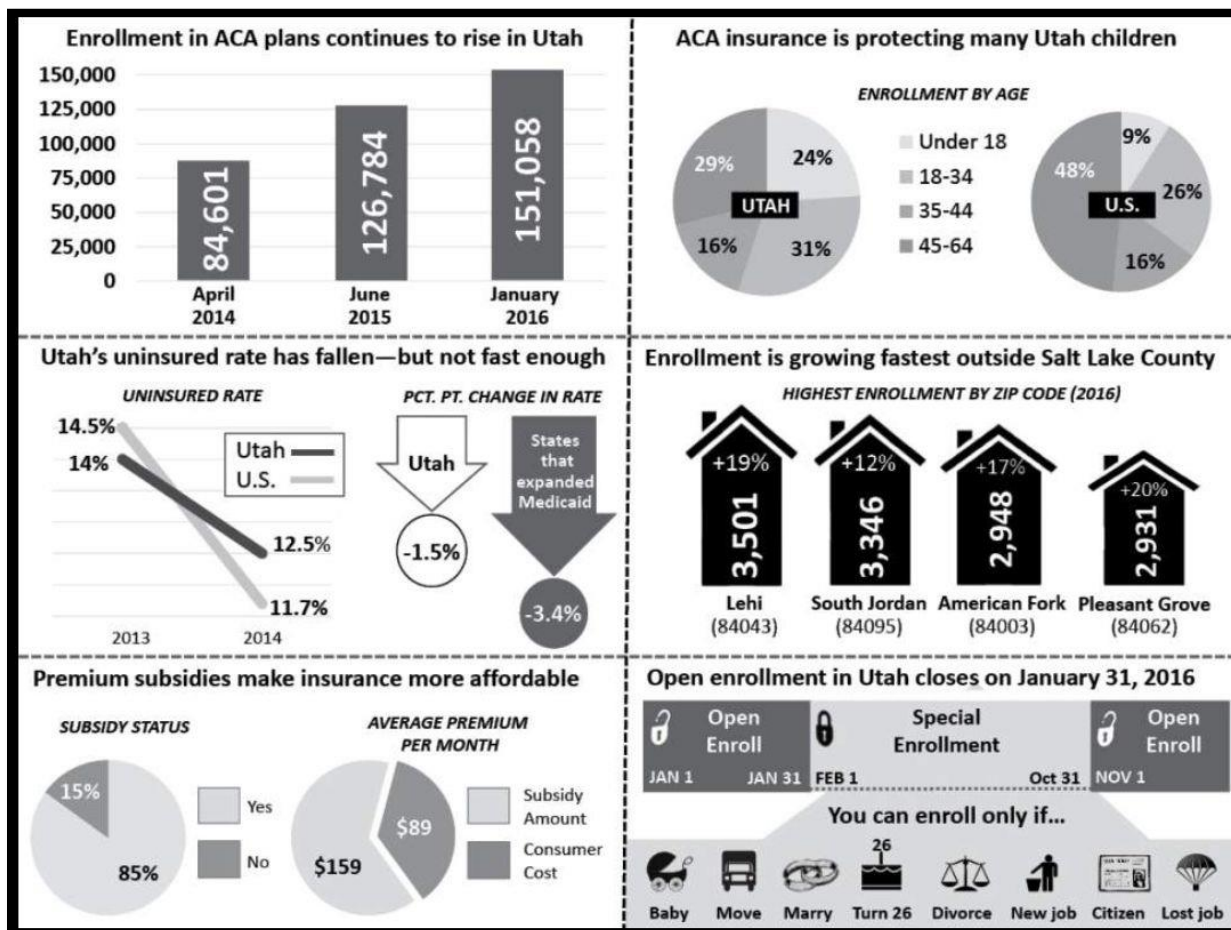
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The politicization of health reform has obscured the fact that 151,000 Utahns — including the nation's highest percentage of children — have signed up for insurance through the Affordable Care Act (ACA), also called Obamacare.

Also lost in the partisan noise is how the ACA protects all Utahns by stopping insurers from using pre-existing health conditions to deny coverage, reduced premiums for older residents, makes preventive care completely free, and lets young adults under age 26 remain on their parents' insurance. This chart illustrates other ways that health reform is making a real difference to thousands of Utah families.



But despite the ACA's achievements in Utah, we need more ideas and action to retain our position as a health care leader. Utah's 85,000 uninsured children rank us 46th in the nation, while our overall uninsured rate is

now 7 percent higher than the national average. Prices for most medical procedures remain hidden from public view and still vary widely among hospitals and providers.

Plus, thousands of Utah families remain uninsured because they can't afford workplace premiums, yet they are barred from receiving ACA subsidies because of a glitch that Congress could fix. The state-run program that could remedy their situation, Utah's Premium Partnership, has enrolled only 900 people because of limited publicity and complex rules.

Most of these problems could be fixed by our elected representatives, but state lawmakers are braking the pace of reform by refusing to expand Medicaid to 63,000 Utahns who earn too little to qualify for ACA insurance, yet earn too much or can't qualify for Medicaid. Instead of closing this gap, the latest legislative proposals will create more pitfalls for Utah families, while dis-incentivizing employment and healthy living.

Is the ACA perfect? No. Is the ACA protecting more Utah families from illness, accidents, and financial hardship? Definitely. Do we need more reform to ensure the competitiveness of our state's healthcare system? Absolutely. And the first step is to stop playing political games with health reform (and people's lives) and re-focus the discussion on pragmatic solutions that actually work.

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