

Utah among last to deliberate about health care

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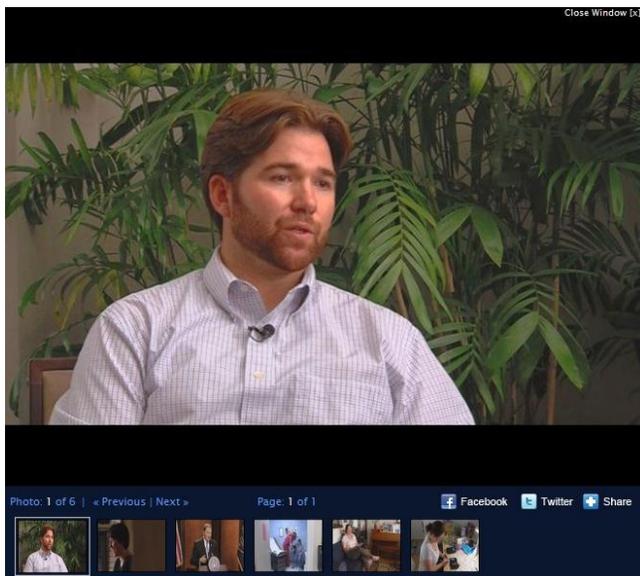
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SALT LAKE CITY— The State of Utah will be among the last states to decide whether to expand Medicaid coverage to include more working class residents.

Governor Gary Herbert has said the state shouldn't be rushed into a decision, and that he wants to make sure he has all the information on how much it's going to cost Utah in the long run.

In the meantime, people who can't afford insurance said they know how much it's costing them now.

Sophia Jones tests her blood sugar, and closely monitors her diabetes, but the disease still causes health problems. Her insurance is expensive — and she said she really doesn't have a choice.

"Four or five days without insulin, and you're looking at 'Hey, here comes a coma; let's go to the emergency room,'" Jones said.

Jones is among thousands of working poor in Utah who would benefit from expanding Medicaid, part of the Affordable Care Act. She said there would be more money for her kids, and to improve her quality of life.

However, the state hasn't signed up, and it's possible it won't. The governor has delayed the decision all year. At his monthly KUED news conference, he said he's still asking questions about the cost, and seeking a "Utah solution."

"I'm going to make a decision based on what's in the best interest of the people of Utah, not only in the short term, but in the long term," Herbert said.

If the state turns the program down, Utah taxpayers will pay for the expansion without gaining any benefit. For that reason, health care advocates said they feel the state really has limited choices.

"We really have no reason not to take it," said Matt Slonaker of the Utah Health Policy Project. "After all, it's out taxpayer dollars too that go into these coffers, and we deserve some of that back."

Leslie Green is one of the working poor who would benefit from the expansion. She said she and her husband work full time for their five kids, and they've had to choose between health care and food in the past.

"We have worked our way up, so we didn't need the help and I didn't want to be that person, but that was the hand I was dealt," Green said.

Utah isn't the only state deliberating the Medicaid expansion. There are 28 states moving toward accepting the offer. If they do, the Federal government will pay 100 percent of the cost for the first three years. The other states are worried about how to pay their 10 percent share after those first three years.