

# Bob Bernick's Notebook: The Highs and Heartbreak of Public Policy

Bob Bernick

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Often times being a part-time Utah legislator can be fun.

A lot of work, yes.

But you get to rub shoulders with the movers and shakers in our little Beehive society.

Important people call you “representative” or “senator” or even “chairman.”



Sometimes you get your name in the newspaper or on TV or the radio (hopefully over good things you’ve done).

There’s often a feeling of accomplishment – frustrations, too – as you help build a \$15 billion budget and pass laws that often affect the everyday lives of Utahns.

But there can be – not too often, we hope – actual heartbreak in the job.

That’s because real people, with real problems, come to you for help.

And sometimes you don’t, maybe even can’t, help – for any number of reasons.

That struck home Wednesday for Utah House Speaker Greg Hughes.

Hughes and the 63-member strong House GOP caucus has been the main sticking point in Utah NOT adopting a Medicaid expansion program yet.

I won’t go through all the fiscal/political reasons for that. Many of our readers know the stories too well.

Now the “Gang of Six” – Hughes, Gov. Gary Herbert, Lt. Gov. Spencer Cox and other GOP legislative leaders – is working to find a solution to Medicaid expansion, which comes as part of Obamacare.

In an open GOP House caucus Wednesday, Rep. Raymond Ward, R-Bountiful, told Hughes that Carol Frisby – who was fighting colon cancer and met with Hughes this spring over Medicaid expansion – had died on Monday.

Ward gave Hughes a note written by Frisby on Saturday when Ward and his wife visited her and her husband Brent in a hospice care facility.

You can read the story I wrote [here](#).

My point being, no one wants to feel that their action, or inaction, caused harm to someone else – or even their death.

That is a pretty big charge to be made.

A big burden to carry.

Ward is one of the few House Republicans to vote against the rest of the caucus and for Herbert’s Healthy Utah Medicaid expansion in the 2015 Legislature.

Ward is clearly frustrated and was upset Wednesday over Frisby’s passing.

Hughes, too, seemed to me to be upset over hearing about Frisby’s death – saying she was a “sweet” lady when he met her in his office.

Many GOP legislators are in a tough spot over Medicaid expansion.

First, it comes with Obamacare – and a president and national health plan they really, really don’t like.

Second, Obamacare – on purpose – is tough to reject politically – for the federal government pays 100 percent of the Medicaid expansion for the first two years (Utah has already missed those two years), and then on a sliding scale down to 90 percent of the programs cost.

Utah is losing tens of millions of dollars a year in new taxes imposed for Obamacare – as Herbert points out – that are not coming back to Utah, as they would under Herbert’s Healthy Utah expansion plan.

Healthy Utah was rejected by House Republicans during the last general session.

And Hughes – a former amateur boxer – with relish said at the time he was willing to be the “point man” and take the heat for the GOP caucus’ anti-Healthy Utah stand.

That got Hughes a lot of negative publicity outside the Capitol, and a lot of support within his caucus.

Now Hughes is the face of the death of a little old lady – Carol Frisby.

A tough call. Maybe even an unfair call.

Hughes, a husband, and father is not a cruel or unfeeling man.

He wants to do the best he can for the state, and for her people.

He is a fiscal conservative. And he doesn’t like Obamacare nor the mandates and restrictions it places on Utah state government.

He fears Medicaid expansion could overwhelm the state’s General Fund – and draw vital resources away from other state programs, both in Human Services and eventually higher and public education.

But Wednesday, when I saw the shocked, upset face of Hughes when Ward gave him that note, and later when I tried to ask him some questions about expansion vs. some needy Utahns, came the realization that being a Utah legislator is not always fun and exciting.

Sometimes it can be very painful.