

EXCLUSIVE: Doc group says no to physicians paying for Utah Medicaid expansion

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(KUTV) It may be a key piece in proposed Utah Medicaid expansion, but the Utah Medical Association says doctors should not pay for part of the state's share.

"We are against a physician tax," Michelle McOmber, CEO of the UMA, told 2News. "We are absolutely not okay with [it]."

McOmber's statements followed recent comments from Gov. Gary Herbert and others that "stakeholders" in Medicaid expansion should help shoulder some of the costs.

It's been widely reported the federal government is paying 100 percent of expansion in many states, which would go down to 90 percent by 2020. Utah would have to bear the rest.

Two weeks ago, the governor said he expected to call a special session this year to vote on a new plan, being hammered out by a group of state leaders known as "The Gang of Six."

He said for every dollar that would flow from Washington back through Utah's medical system, providers would get 93 cents and could be asked to pay 7 cents to the state.

"We're trying to find something that's fair, that's proportional, that's balanced, that's optimal, that takes the risk away from taxpayers," Herbert said during his monthly news conference on KUED.

But the Utah Medical Association contended reimbursement rates to doctors through Medicaid are lower than private insurance, and that some physicians can even lose money in seeing Medicaid patients.

Still, medical doctors are thought of as well-paid.

2News asked McOmber to respond to those who might say, "If anybody can afford it, physicians can afford it."

"Well, we can say that about a lot of different groups," she said. "I could say that about engineers that help with roads. What about attorneys who help the Attorney General's Office with lawsuits?"

"In order for a plan to succeed, the support of physicians is vital," said Jon Cox, spokesman for the governor. "They supported the governor's 'Healthy Utah Plan' and we hope they can support the eventual plan" for Medicaid expansion.

McOmber said the UMA is not picking a fight, but would oppose a physician "tax," and would not rule out suing the state, if one is imposed.

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