

Quit playing politics and pass Healthy Utah

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Standard-Examiner Editorial Board

Link: <http://www.standard.net/Our-View/2015/10/15/If-you-want-a-healthy-Utah-pass-Healthy-Utah>

Maybe the 63 Republicans in the Utah House met secretly for a reason Tuesday night. Because when news surfaced that only seven of them voted in favor of their own plan to expand Medicaid, they looked like fools — callous, obdurate fools playing politics with the lives of Utah's poor.



Low-income Utahns deserve better. At a minimum, they deserve Gov. Gary Herbert's Healthy Utah Plan.

After the House [rejected Healthy Utah](#), Herbert and a handful of Republicans spent the summer crafting an alternative called Utah Access Plus. They developed the plan [in closed-door meetings](#) and shut out Democrats.

Utah Access Plus relied on \$450 million in federal money and \$55 million in new taxes on doctors, hospitals and pharmaceutical companies. Health care providers and fiscal conservatives hated it.

So much for Herbert's plans to call a special session this month to approve Medicare expansion. So much, too, for the 125,000 Utahns who still find themselves without health insurance coverage.

Sen. Jim Dabakis, a Salt Lake City Democrat, called Tuesday "a red letter day for stupidity in Utah's political history."

Republicans call the shots in Utah, and they hate the Affordable Care Act. They'd rather see the poor go without access to health care than accept federal money to expand Medicare.

Standing on political principle is one thing. But according to the most recent data from [Utah Kids Count](#), 17.2 percent of Weber County children lived in poverty in 2013 and more than 9 percent had no health insurance.

Political principle does nothing to help those children when they're sick.

Developed as a three-year pilot program, [Healthy Utah](#) would've expanded insurance to 138,000 people by 2018. State costs started at \$4.6 million, growing to \$45.6 million. But federal aid also increased from \$445 million to \$546 million.

It never got out of committee. Republicans believed they could come up with something better, and Herbert played along.

That was a mistake. Utah continues to forgo millions of federal dollars for Medicaid expansion, and thousands of the state's poor go without health insurance coverage.

If the best idea Republican leaders could come up with is Utah Access Plus, it's time to adopt Herbert's original plan and expand Medicare access through Healthy Utah.