

## Kasich implores GOP to expand Medicaid

In his third State of the State address, Gov. Kasich extols Ohio's 'fantastic' turnaround and explains his budget



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Before a giant Ohio flag, Gov. John Kasich delivers his State of the State address to an audience of about 1,700 people in Lima.

By **Joe Vardon**

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LIMA, Ohio — Thirteen minutes before he was even scheduled to speak, a statement of support was circulated by Ohio State University's Wexner Medical Center praising Gov. John Kasich for "courageously propos(ing)" a Medicaid expansion in his State of the State speech.

Kasich used his third State of the State speech as governor to implore lawmakers in his own Republican Party to "examine your conscience" as they consider his proposed expansion of Medicaid.

The speech, the second State of the State ever delivered outside of the capital, was delivered to about 1,700 people at the Lima Veterans Memorial Civic & Convention Center. Kasich read from prepared text at times during the 62-minute speech and was markedly more focused than he was in Steubenville last year.

"We are succeeding here in Ohio at turning our state around, and it is fantastic," he said.

Kasich methodically ticked through segments on job creation, past legislative successes and his proposed budget as it relates to taxes, the Ohio Turnpike, school funding and higher education.

But he reached back for something extra on Medicaid, perhaps, in part, because many of the 59 Republicans in the Ohio House and the 23 in the Senate are queasy about the idea.

The expansion — an option under President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act — would provide health care for hundreds of thousands of poor Ohioans and be funded fully for three years by the federal government. Kasich defends it because of the \$13 billion he says it will return to Ohio over seven years and because of the funding it would free up to treat the mentally ill.

"I can't look at the disabled, I can't look at the poor, I can't look at the mentally ill, I can't look at the addicted and think we ought to ignore them," Kasich said. "For those who live in the shadows of life, for those who are the least among us, I will not accept the fact that the most vulnerable in our state should be ignored. We can help them."

Earlier yesterday, the Ohio Liberty Coalition, a network of tea party groups, threatened a primary challenge for any Republican lawmaker who votes in favor of the expansion.

“I know it’s controversial,” Kasich said, before he called out a Republican representative by name. “We’re not ignoring the weak. Jim Buchy (of Greenville), the Lord doesn’t want us to ignore them.”

But House and Senate leaders were noncommittal after the speech. Rep. Cheryl Grossman, R-Grove City, said she has concerns “as far as sustainability and what we’re looking at long-term.”

“We need to continue to investigate options and see how it ends up,” she said.

The expansion would be fully funded by the federal government for three years before dropping to 90 percent after a period of several years, and Kasich included a provision in his proposal to reverse the expansion if the government changes the parameters of its funding guarantees.

“I applaud the governor for expanding Medicaid as provided for by the Affordable Care Act, which will have significant benefits for Ohioans who are struggling to obtain basic health-care coverage,” said Democratic House Minority Leader Armond Budish of Beachwood.

But Budish and other Democrats all remained critical of Kasich’s proposals to broaden the sales-tax base (to pay for cuts in income- and sales-tax rates) and change the school-funding formula. They said the latter does not direct enough money to struggling schools.

John Green, political-science professor at the University of Akron, said Kasich’s speech was “a good start on what will likely be some tough negotiating.”

Kasich also handed out his Governor’s Courage Awards for the second-straight year. The recipients were astronaut Neil Armstrong (posthumously); Sondra Williams of Columbus, an advocate for people with autism; and faculty and staff members from Chardon High School, where a teenager with a gun killed three students on Feb. 27.

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