

## Michael Gonidakis commentary: Medicaid expansion good for state, conservative movement



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Memo to tea party leadership: Average Ohioans, like average Americans, decided as long as 15 years ago that it is intolerable in a country as wealthy as ours for people, even poor people, to not have medical coverage and regular care.

That is why you are so out of step with Ohioans when you oppose Gov. John Kasich's common-sense plan to take advantage of 100 percent federally paid Medicaid coverage for an estimated 275,000 poor, and in many cases sick, Ohioans, an estimated 75 percent of whom are working. As a Republican, I don't like Obamacare any better than you do. Like you, I worked to defeat Obama last fall. But we didn't win. And we can't let the philosophical opposition of the last election cause us to make a serious error in business judgment now.

By opposing this extension of Medicaid to fellow Ohioans, you put our state at serious financial risk.

And you also put the conservative movement at political risk.

Like it or not, Obamacare is now the law. One of the things it will do is to withdraw "disproportionate share" payments to hospitals all over Ohio. This is funding the federal government has given for years to hospitals that provide uncompensated care to poor and indigent patients. The logic was that since the law expanded Medicaid, this disproportionate-share funding no longer would be needed. But the Supreme Court upset the Medicaid-expansion mandate, so Ohio now has the worst of both worlds: withdrawal of charity-coverage support for hospitals on one hand, and no program to replace it on the other.

Kasich has wisely put practicality at the forefront and proposed voluntarily taking the federal offer to expand Medicaid coverage, thus rebalancing the equation. Make no mistake, the failure to regain this balance will cause our major hospitals severe financial distress, weakening all of our health care.

I understand the emotional resistance to Obamacare. But this opposition to Medicaid expansion isn't even smart politically.

While the reasons could be debated all day long, the fact is that the 275,000 Ohioans who would be covered under the Kasich plan are both poorer and sicker than average Ohioans. Some are victims of their own life decisions, but others are pushed to desperation by the ugly economic and job environment we now face. Most are working, but for very low wages.

Do tea party leaders really want to say “To hell with these fellow Ohioans”? Are you so bound up in ideology that you are willing to sacrifice the health of neighbors to that ideology, based on funding concerns that may or may not happen in five years? I know that the response is that your ideas of how to cover these people are superior. I agree, but we didn’t prevail. Are we going to say, “Wait four years while we get our act together and maybe win and maybe come up with a better plan?”

A similar kind of ideological, rather than compassionate conservative, response already has cost us the goodwill of the growing Hispanic community in America in the immigration debate. In the Medicaid debate, Republican and independent women are among the strongest supporters of ensuring that all families have medical care. Do we really want to alienate this constituency in the same thoughtless way we turned Hispanics against conservatives?

Not this conservative. And, thankfully, not Kasich, who is fulfilling his duty to be governor of all Ohioans. His compassion, like his compassion for families facing autism and his compassion for poor kids with comparatively minor drug violations, describes for me what compassionate conservatism is about. He deserves support for this initiative.

Michael Gonidakis is president of Ohio Right to Life.

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