

Kasich's Medicaid plan makes sense

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In pursuing an expansion of Medicaid under the federal health-care overhaul, Gov. John Kasich wisely is putting pragmatism before party and ideology.

Kasich has made his opposition to the Affordable Care Act plain, but he understands that it is now a fact of life. Any responsible leader also can see that the terms of the expansion will benefit Ohio. It will mean health-insurance coverage for 275,000 Ohioans who have none now. Because the federal government will cover all of the cost of coverage for new enrollees through 2020, an academic study has estimated the expansion will mean a net gain to Ohio of \$1.4 billion through 2022.

The feds have pledged to pay 90 percent of the expansion cost after 2020. Kasich wisely has declared that if the federal support ever falls low enough to make the expansion a net loss to Ohio, the state will opt out.

In the meantime, not only will broader coverage cut down on expensive, uninsured emergency-room care and the other inefficiencies of poor health-care access, it also will save the state directly, because Medicaid will cover some of the costs currently paid by the state, such as health care for prisoners and mental-health services for uninsured or underinsured people.

Most fundamentally, more than a quarter-million Ohioans who now can't afford to go to a doctor's office or fill a prescription will be able to do so, and that's a quality-of-life improvement that can't be measured.

It also should lessen the burden on hospital emergency rooms, where the uninsured typically seek last-resort care which is also the most expensive kind.

Kasich, often named as a likely aspirant for national office, is taking a drubbing from conservatives around the country for this stand — in the words of one, giving “aid and comfort to Obama.”

Such purists generally aren't responsible for the economic well-being of entire states. They tend not to be elected to high office, because most voters prefer politicians interested in solving problems in the world as it exists, not as they believe it should be.

Kasich should not care whether accepting the federally funded Medicaid expansion benefits a political opponent. His job is to care about whether Ohioans have a chance at good jobs and a good quality of life.

Declining to expand coverage wouldn't just maintain the status quo; it would leave Ohio worse off, because of other provisions of the federal health-care law.

Because the law favors expansion, in 2014 it will cut back on the federal funds that go to reimburse hospitals for some of the uncompensated care they provide for the uninsured. If Medicaid isn't expanded and hospitals no longer receive the reimbursement, poor people won't stop getting sick; hospitals simply will take a hit to the bottom line, and premiums for those lucky enough to have health insurance likely will rise to make up for it.

Kasich also can be commended for spearheading an effort by Republican governors to negotiate with the White House on making the terms of the Medicaid expansion more flexible.

That's the sort of common-sense problem solving Americans are hungry for.

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