

# IACI veering toward the wrong side of Medicaid expansion

Wayne Hoffman/Idaho Freedom Foundation

The Idaho Association of Commerce and Industry (IACI) is flirting with the dangerous idea of backing Medicaid expansion. The organization hasn't come out yet with an endorsement. Yet.

At its conference in Coeur d'Alene in June, lawmakers got to hear a decidedly pro-expansion presentation. And IACI's president, Alex LeBeau, recently told the media that expanding Medicaid will be a win for businesses that face up to \$18.5 million in penalties if they don't insure their employees—fines that are avoided if those employees are covered through Medicaid.

"For us, it's a business-numbers issue," LaBeau said to the media. "It's pretty clear from the information and the numbers that Medicaid expansion would save industry a lot of money."

It won't. To believe it to be so, you'd have to ignore entirely the fact that the federal government is promising to pick up 90 percent of the costs associated with Medicaid expansion. Even assuming the federal government will keep its promises (which is no sure thing), there seems to be something immoral about the adults of today knowingly shoving today's medical cost to the next generation.

Savings for industry? Nonsense.

Medicaid is already a broken system, rife with waste and fraud. Medicaid does not improve health care. In fact, states that expanded Medicaid before Obama made it "cool" have seen a decline in the quality of health care. Medicaid patients, many docs will also tell you, are more litigious and more likely to miss appointments.

IACI also supported the formation of a state insurance exchange, so I won't be incredibly shocked to see IACI join this latest push to implement Obamacare. IACI will argue that Medicaid expansion will result in a reduction in cost to local taxpayers, the state will be able to eliminate its state-run program for helping the poor and under- or uninsured.

IACI previously told us that a state insurance exchange would allow our state to retain control over a component of Obamacare. Don't do a state exchange, IACI and its allies said, and we'll end up with a federal exchange, controlled by the federal government, and that would be terrible.

Now, they're preparing to argue the opposite: Ditch the state-controlled system in favor a federal program in order to save money.

The state program for helping uninsured Idahoans certainly needs to be eliminated, but not in favor of big government. Charity care programs, including free clinics and faith-based cooperatives, are far superior options that are already saving taxpayers money—businesses and their employees—without the expansion of government.

A program, such as the one being touted by Dr. Loel Fenwick of Priest Lake, that allows Idahoans to robustly save for their health care costs, is another great option. Across the country, doctor-initiated subscription-based health care services, ala carte and cash-based programs are marketplace inventions that are lowering the cost of health procedures and improving the quality of care for patients.

LaBeau says this is a numbers issue. In that regard, he may be right. Here's a number: \$17 trillion, our national debt. And if I have anything to say about it, President Obama, state lawmakers, governors and organizations that side with Medicaid expansion will own every bit of that number and its negative consequences for the state's businesses and their employees.

Wayne Hoffman