

Government caused the health-care problem lawmakers are attempting to solve

By Wayne Hoffman

Idaho lawmakers are hell-bent on passing something — frankly, anything — to cover the so-called “gap population” of people who don’t qualify for Medicaid or Obamacare insurance subsidies. They forget, or pretend not to know, that politicians just like them got us where we are today.

The House Health and Welfare Committee previewed its Big Government health-care thinking Thursday. Committee members promised to move deliberately toward support of some legislation, whatever that may be, on Monday.

Rep. Kelley Packer, R-McCammon, preached to her colleagues that “we have a responsibility as a Legislature to find a solution” for people who aren’t already enrolled in a government program. Said Packer, “I do not want to go home without doing something, without voting on something ... for this population.”

Committee Chairman Fred Wood of Burley added, “I think the Legislature is talking about what we should do as opposed to whether we should be covering this gap population.”

Two proposals are expected to be unveiled Monday. One would create a study committee. The other would start a grant program that would provide several million dollars to community health clinics to provide services to the gap population and gather data. Other ideas may be presented, including some form of Medicaid expansion (although if it is presented, it will likely be labeled something else to lessen its toxicity).

Packer, who has advocated for Medicaid expansion, telegraphed that she wants more than a study or a fistful of dollars thrown into the system. “We have to care for each other, and we have to do the right thing. ... Let’s quit throwing money at non-solutions. Let’s quit studying this,” she said.

Professional politicians like Packer are unwilling to accept that if lawmakers really want to help, they should stop trying to help. In other words, Legislators should consider get-out-of-our-way solutions for health-care.

For example, they should get out of the way and let non-government locally-based programs operate. After all, community programs, including those run by churches, charities or direct primary care providers have been infinitely more successful targeting services to people in need, providing help, lifting them out of poverty and doing so at less cost. This idea was recently described in an Idaho Freedom Foundation commentary.

Further, if Packer and Wood really want to help Idahoans, they and their colleagues should lift restrictions that make it downright impossible for some medical practices to offer comprehensive, customized care to patients.

Want to know how difficult Idaho make it for practitioners to operate? Talk to Packer’s GOP primary opponent, naturopathic physician Jason West, whose family clinic in Pocatello hangs by a thread thanks to Idaho’s restrictive medical practice regulations.

Another way legislators could help: Eliminate Idaho’s 55-year-old state ban on buying or selling health insurance across state lines. Doing that would make it easier for low-income people to obtain a policy that might actually be affordable compared to policies sold by the state’s few insurance monopolies.

None of these get-out-of-the-way ideas, or others like them, is up for debate. That’s unfortunate.

Politicians hope that you won't recognize that they're the ones who created the health care problem, which they're trying to solve. Maybe instead of creating a new program and enrolling more people in government services, they should try to undo the damage they've already done and continue to do.