

Media ignore true cost of Medicaid expansion

By Wayne Hoffman

Yet again, the media are trying to convince Idahoans their purity of fact outshines that of those nefarious, dastardly, ideologically-driven legislators and folks like me who are refusing to accept another big government idea.

A story from the Spokesman-Review newspaper, reprinted statewide by the Associated Press, claimed that Idaho taxpayers would save \$390 million were the state to expand the Medicaid program as proposed by Obamacare.

The savings claim is entirely bogus. The claim comes from a reporter's "crunching of the numbers" from the local-state indigent care program. The reporter, in short, presumed certain things about the current program's cost and the federal government's promise to pick up nearly all the costs associated with the Medicaid expansion for the next several years.

The story caused the usual editorial page writers to line up for the walk off the same cliff of self-righteousness. Kevin Richert of the Idaho Statesman gushed, "That's a compelling number—certainly enough so to frame the debate. Any legislator or candidate who flatly rejects Medicaid expansion is speaking from ideology. It's really that simple."

Opinion writer Corey Taule, at the Post Register in Idaho Falls, wrote, "And yet, there remain those who, in defiance of common sense, would continue the childish fight against 'Obamacare,'" further lamenting big government opponents and their "slavish devotion to their rigid ideology (which) takes precedence over the best interests of those they were elected to represent."

Of course Kevin and Corey are governed by microchips and diodes. Human emotion eliminated, they can rely on simple math for their answers.

I'm kidding, of course. Kevin and Corey are friends, though their slavish devotion to congressional promises appears misguided.

Unfortunately, the analysis on which they're relying doesn't take into account (or at least considers separately) the fact that Idaho taxpayers will still bear the cost of the Medicaid expansion's administrative costs, which total in the tens of millions of dollars each year.

And then there's this: the federal government is in the midst of a fiscal crisis. Or haven't you heard? So for any state legislator—or any newspaper opinion writer—to expect the state can take on an expanded Medicaid program without consequence is diabolically shortsighted.

I asked U.S. Sen. Mike Crapo about this last month. Here's what he said: "I don't think that anybody can trust that the federal government will continue to pay 100 percent of the increased cost (of Obamacare) ... States will have to assume that they will begin assuming increasing

portions of that, if not all of it, rather rapidly.” That, Crapo said, is “legitimate cause to be very concerned” about taking on new program expenses that threaten to bankrupt states.

Moreover, the careful reader will note that Idaho taxpayers still pay the cost of Medicaid expansion; the money merely comes from a different pot of money labeled “federal.”

Corey writes that the current county medical indigent program is “as expensive as it is inhumane.”

But if you’d like to meet the generous Idaho taxpayers who will pay for expanded Medicaid, travel to your local hospital’s maternity ward and see them being born. Our children—and their children—know not what debt awaits them as a result of our lavish overspending and our indifference to their obligation to pay it back. That, my friends, is inhumane.