

Other Viewpoints

Medicaid study not the last word

A new study calculates that a broad expansion of Medicaid eligibility would cost Kansas \$1.1 billion over 10 years, more than double the anticipated increase if the state maintains its current low eligibility threshold.

That's a hard-to-swallow commitment for a governor and legislators who are viscerally averse to most government spending and all aspects of "Obamacare."

But the findings from the Aon Hewitt consulting firm can't be considered in isolation. Leaders have a responsibility to seek a complete and accurate picture of what Medicaid expansion, as called for in the federal Affordable Care Act, would mean for the state.

For instance:

- How would expansion affect the state's economy?

The U.S. government would pay 100 percent of the costs for three years, and never less than 90 percent. That would mean billions of dollars to provide jobs for health care workers and related businesses in Kansas.

Refusal to expand Medicaid would have an opposite effect. Hospitals would face the financial burden of having to serve uninsured patients, but without federal compensation payments, which Washington is phasing out.

Hospital associations in Missouri and other states have commissioned studies showing significant economic gains resulting from expansion. The Kansas Hospital Association expects to release a study done in cooperation with George Washington University as early as this week, a spokeswoman said.

- What costs would the state save by expanding Medicaid?
- Many Kansans who receive state-subsidized mental health services would be covered if the state expanded eligibility from its current level of 26 percent of the poverty level for adults to 133 percent. An expansion might also relieve the state of some costs it pays for care of disabled citizens, legal work and obligations to children aging out of foster care.
- What would an expansion mean for low-income working Kansans?

Aon Hewitt estimated that 226,000 additional children and adults would be served. That would result in more healthy and financially stable families, fewer costly and chronic illnesses, and a more productive workforce.

By not expanding Medicaid, Kansas would create a "doughnut hole" in which citizens would be unable to access services available to Kansans above and below their income range.

In a statement last week, Gov. Sam Brownback's office said the expansion would be burdensome and take resources needed for other state responsibilities.

But other conservative GOP governors in states like Arizona, Ohio and Michigan are coming to the opposite conclusion and pushing for the move.

Gov. Brownback owes it to his citizens to have more complete information before announcing whether he'll support expansion.

— The Kansas City Star, via the Associated Press

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Reservoir needs to be renewed

John Redmond Reservoir has become the poster child for the reservoir sedimentation issue in Kansas. Since it was built, the reservoir has lost more than 40 percent of its capacity to sedimentation.

Located in Coffey County, John Redmond was built in 1964 to control flooding in the Neosho River Basin. The reservoir also provides water storage for municipal and industrial customers who contract with the state of Kansas.

Susan Metzger, policy and planning director at the Kansas Water Office, says sedimentation happens in all lakes, but at John Redmond it happens to be filling in quicker than anticipated.

Three years of drought have exacerbated the dwindling water supply in the reservoir. The primary concern remains the loss of storage for the downstream municipalities and industrial customers.

"We need to identify ways to improve storage conditions to meet the customers' needs, especially if this drought were to extend over time," Metzger told nearly 100 people attending a public information meeting in Burlington on Feb. 5.

In an effort to slow down the amount of silt flowing into John Redmond, watershed and stream bank stabilization initiatives have taken place upstream. The Water Office is working with the Army Corps of Engineers to reallocate a portion of the flood storage to water supply.

The office is also asking for a two-foot increase in the permanent pool from 1,039 feet elevation to 1,041 that might help meet water



John Schlageck

• Insights
Kansas Farm Bureau

users' demands for another 20 to 30 years. Even with these efforts, the office understands John Redmond needs additional help to restore water storage capacity and meet water customers' needs.

"We believe our most efficient, and most practical alternative is to remove sediment through dredging at John Redmond," Metzger said.

To supply future water demands, the office says, 600,000 cubic yards of sediment will need to be removed each year. Doing so could create approximately 400 acre feet of water storage per year.

"Estimates project it will cost \$6 to \$15 per cubic yard for removal," Metzger said. "This would amount to \$6 million to \$8 million a year to remove sediment."

The cost for the project will be paid for entirely by nonfederal funds, she added.

The office has money to accomplish the preliminary planning phase, the development of an environmental impact statement and some preliminary design and engineering for disposal.

"We've made the argument for this project," Metzger said. "Now we'll see what these pro-

posals will show us about the realities of this dredging project."

During the public comments, Glenn Fisher, mayor of Oswego, expressed the sentiment of most people who live downstream from John Redmond and rely on the reservoir for drinking water and the operation of their towns.

"Whatever we need to do, dredging or raising the water level, do it," Fisher said. "I want to emphasize the importance to us, because without the water we aren't going to be able to maintain our communities. To me, this is more important than somebody fishing."

Landowners and farmers expressed their concern that the power of eminent domain, or condemnation through court suit, not be used to acquire land for sediment deposit. The office promised such land will either be acquired through voluntary contribution of the property or through negotiated agreements, including compensation for temporary use of the property.

"If you own land near the reservoir and are interested in learning more about the possibility of using your property for temporary sediment disposal, please contact KWO," Metzger said.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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'Hard facts' say costs will rise

"Weekly Hard Facts"

• The Kansas Department of Education says taxpayer support for education will set a new record this year at \$12,738 total per-pupil spending.

• By 2033, 21 percent of Kansas' population is projected to be on Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, up from 13 percent currently.

• Kansas' Medicaid expenditures are projected to grow by \$4.7 billion, 29 percent beyond the increase projected without the Affordable Care Act.

• Legislators can only control about 30 percent of the budget by making a commitment to hold schools harmless and honoring all statutory obligations built into the budget. State and local governments spend the largest part of tax revenues from property and sales taxes.

• "Paycheck Protection" empowers employees by requiring labor unions to obtain approval from members to spend their contributions for political activities, parties, advocacy or candidates.

By March 1, the Legislature will have reached the halfway point for the 2013 Session, known as Turnaround. This date is when



Ralph Ostmeyer

• State Senator

each chamber begins to consider the bills from the other. The pace for the next couple of weeks will pick up, as there will be more bills reaching the Senate floor for debate as committees continue to pass bills out for debate by the Senate.

A Look At Some Major Issues

A bill is pending that would require drug testing for recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families who are eligible for cash assistance and unemployment compensation to undergo drug testing if there is reasonable suspicion they are using illegal substances. SB149 has been referred to the Senate Commerce Committee for hearings.

Strengthening the state economy is a pressing issue this session. The goal is to develop a favorable tax policy that would further en-

able employers to create jobs and at the same time move toward a zero income tax. The Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee this week moved to leave in place the deduction for property taxes Kansans pay.

Action from My Office

This past week, the Senate honored students from the Kansas Academy of Math and Science at Fort Hays State University. I was honored to meet Amber Predew from Goodland High School. Amber was questioned in Senate Education Committee and came across as being very knowledgeable. This KAMC program is growing each year, and Fort Hays State should be proud of its success.

It is Town Hall Meeting time again. Saturday, we'll be at the Decatur County Courthouse from noon to 1 p.m.

There are still some slots open for Senate pages this session. Monday, March 25, there are four places available. For page and other information, contact my office:

I can be reached by writing to Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th Street, Room 136-E, Topeka, Kan., 66612, or call (785) 296-7399. My e-mail address is Ralph.Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov.

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Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

"SKEET" IS ALSO, OF COURSE, A FUN WORD TO SAY...

SO IS "HEEZY," A COOL SLANG WORD I FIRST USED AT THE WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENTS DINNER A FEW YEARS AGO...



...WHERE I SOUNDED JUST AS COMFORTABLE SAYING IT AS I DO TALKING ABOUT SKEET SHOOTING, A SPORT WHICH I LOVE TO DO ALL THE TIME...

Tinsley 2-21