

Written by Jeffrey L. Boney  
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Texas has more uninsured people living in the state than the national average.

According to the Health Insurance Coverage of the Total Population report conducted by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Texas has 25% uninsured citizens compared to a national average of 16% across the entire U.S.

As troubling as these figures are, it is even more concerning for many that Governor Rick Perry has decided to oppose the Medicaid expansion and health care exchanges, leaving billions of federal dollars on the table that could benefit the uninsured in Texas.

Although the U.S. Supreme Court recently voted to uphold the Affordable Care Act (ACA), often referred to as 'Obamacare', Perry was adamant that Texas would not expand Medicaid or establish a health insurance exchange per the federal law.

"I stand proudly with the growing chorus of governors who reject the Obamacare power grab," Perry released in a statement. "Neither a 'state' exchange nor the expansion of Medicaid under this program would result in better 'patient protection' or in more 'affordable care.' They would only make Texas a mere appendage of the federal government when it comes to health care."

Perry's office sent a letter to U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, rejecting the more than one hundred million dollars in federal funds over the next several years

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and to creating a competitive online insurance marketplace for consumers.

The ruling that was rendered by the Supreme Court gave states like Texas the right to opt out of the Medicaid expansion without penalty.

Perry said that implementing the two major parts of the ACA was the equivalent of adding more people to a sinking Titanic.

State Representative Garnet Coleman issued a statement and chimed in on Governor Perry's decision.

"The move isn't just mean, it's fiscally irresponsible," said Coleman. "What is now completely paid for by Texas will instead be completely paid for by the federal government for the first 3 years and then 90% for every year after that. The federal government is, in effect, offering to shoulder almost all the cost of care that is currently being financed through counties and hospital districts. The Medicaid expansion will also bring relief to those who already have insurance. Right now, hospitals pass the cost of uncompensated care onto those who can pay, and there is a lot of uncompensated care in Texas."

Concerning the reasoning behind why Perry opted to forego the federal funds for the uninsured and not setting up a health insurance exchange in Texas, Coleman said, he wasn't sure what Governor Perry thinks this will accomplish.

"The exchanges will be set up no matter what the Governor says; the only question is by whom," said Coleman. "If we don't do it, the federal government will. This is an area where one might think that President Obama and Governor Perry would agree: Texans are in the best position to know what will work for our state. Indeed, the Governor just said on Fox News that he doesn't trust Washington, but this is exactly what failing to set up our own exchange will do: put that power in the hands of the federal government, not Texans. I hope that Governor Perry will do what is right for Texas and reconsider his position."

UNINSURED ISSUES

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Through 2010, there were approximately 5.7 million Texans, who didn't have health insurance; that is nearly a quarter of the entire population of Texas.

The greatest number of Texans living without health insurance live right here in Houston, where over 630,000 people or 30 percent of the population don't have health insurance.

One of the biggest arguments that people have is that many of the uninsured are illegal immigrants living in extreme poverty. While there are many uninsured illegal immigrants living in Texas, most are just regular citizens with standard bills and jobs.

Many of the uninsured in Texas work on jobs and for companies that don't offer health insurance coverage, making most of them eligible for government programs like Medicaid.

Nearly 21 percent of the uninsured in Texas are black, while Hispanics make up 40 percent and Asians make up 21 percent, according to the Texas Medical Association. The Harris County Hospital District provided \$1.1 billion to care for the uninsured and underinsured last fiscal year, about half of which was financed by county property taxes.

Rep. Coleman went on to say that the Medicaid expansion will reduce the level of uncompensated care, so less will be passed on to others.

"The Medicaid expansion is expected to benefit over 2 million people in just a few years. If we do not move forward with the expansion, a significant number of them will be in the unusually cruel position of being too poor to qualify for assistance. The hardest hit will be those with mental illnesses and those with chronic diseases such as diabetes, cancer, and hypertension. These are conditions that are often very treatable but can develop into something much more serious and expensive without consistent access to primary care. With the Medicaid expansion they will have this access; without it, they won't. There is a great economic impact that the expansion would have in Texas," said Coleman.

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Coleman went on to say that it has been estimated that there is a 3.25 multiplier for every federal healthcare dollar spent in our state, and the Medicaid expansion will result in an additional \$164 billion in federal dollars being spent in Texas over the first decade. He believes that this will have an enormously positive effect on our economy, particularly by creating new jobs for physicians, nurses and nurse practitioners, LVNs, radiologist technicians, and the numerous businesses associated with the medical community.

Addressing the uninsured issue in Texas is a major priority and must be addressed by the current administration sooner rather than later.{jcomments on}