

Thursday, April 11, 2013

Thousands rally in support of Medicaid expansion

By Catherine Candisky and Jim Siegel

More than 2,000 advocates for the uninsured gathered for a lunch-time rally outside the Statehouse, hoping to resuscitate Gov. John Kasich's plan to expand Medicaid health coverage to thousands of poor Ohioans.

"It might take a couple days. It might take a week or two. It might take a month, but never confuse right and left in politics with right and wrong in life," said former state Sen. Bob Spada who serves as president of the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio.

Republican leaders in the House earlier this week stripped the proposed Medicaid expansion from the governor's state budget plan. They said they were concerned about federal spending and didn't believe Congress would be able to live up to its promise to cover 100 percent of the cost for the next three years under the Affordable Care Act.

Under the plan, Medicaid coverage would be expanded to 275,000 more Ohio adults earning up to 138 percent of the federal poverty, bringing \$13 billion in federal aid over the next seven years and resulting in a \$400 million savings for state taxpayers over the next two years. The plan has sweeping support from the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, the Ohio Hospital Association, Ohio Right to Life, major insurers and many groups serving the poor.

Those who would gain coverage under the expansion and their supporters at today's rally urged lawmakers to "put people above politics."

Opponents "don't understand the level of desperation for those who have to go without health coverage," said Mary Hall, a New Albany mother of three children with developmental disabilities.

Susan Bennett, 52, of Columbus, said she used to look badly on those seeking government assistance when she was a well-off, stay-at-home mother in Westerville. But after her husband lost his business and the couple lost their home and ultimately their marriage, her opinion changed.

Uninsured, Bennett now works low-wage temporary jobs and cannot afford treatment for skin cancer on her face and hand.

"It causes a lot of anxiety every time I look in the mirror. Will I be able to get treatment before they have to remove half of my lip?" Bennett said.

At one point, the crowd sent out a "thank you" to Kasich, while urging legislative leaders to change their positions.

"It's clear that, despite what some might want, the drive for better health care is pressing on—and with more intensity," said Rob Nichols, spokesman for Kasich. "Today's outpouring of support, in the rain no less, is testament to the fact that there's such broad support for this. It needs to happen if Ohio's recovery is going to continue and the governor will keep fighting for it."

Article continued here: <http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2013/04/11/Thousands-rally-in-support-of-Medicaid-expansion.html>