Letter to the Editor

December 23, 2013

The Idaho State Legislature ended the 2013 session leaving at least 70,000 Idahoans without health insurance. These are the citizens that live below the poverty line, and do not qualify for any tax credit and not able to afford insurance on the health exchange. Because the majority of our Idaho Legislators voted against expanding Medicaid – in spite of the fact that the Federal Government would pay 90% of the cost for the expansion for three years – these people will not be able to be insured through a state Medicaid plan. The Affordable Care Act was made into law to ensure each and every American has health insurance and access to health care.

Those Idaho Legislators who voted against expanding Medicaid have failed to support the poorest of the poor in our State, leaving them to seek health care emergently, which we know is the most expensive way to get healthcare. We, the taxpayers pay those bills through catastrophic care funds to the tune of $70 million dollars a year. Could we not use those tax dollars for other programs that support the well-being of our citizens? The cost of inadequate access to care is not only fiscal for society, it leaves thousands of individuals debilitated, in pain and depressed, often for life. The cycle of poverty and disability can be averted with proper management of health care costs and access to appropriate health care for each and every person.

Chronic health problems often contribute to a person not being able to work, and chronic health problems keep people in poverty. Providing access to cost-effective health care is a way to keep our citizens out of poverty. Expanding Medicaid in Idaho will not contribute to the national deficit. In fact having healthy people, who can work and support their families, supports a vital economy.

I urge our Idaho Legislators to put this issue on the agenda for 2014 session, and re-consider Medicaid Expansion. Your work is not done, until you legislate a means for all people in Idaho to have equal access to health care. Health care is right, not a partisan issue. Get to work! It is not cost-effective in any context to leave 70,000 Idahoans without health insurance.

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