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Darvin Bentlage: Stance on Medicaid important issue

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With the elections getting closer, it would be wise to ask how our candidates for the Missouri Legislature stand on the issue of Medicaid expansion with the Affordable Care Act.

Missouri is fast becoming one of the last states to implement health care for the working poor. The results in our area have slowly affected the health care system for many clinics and hospitals. Some hospitals have laid off workers and clinics have closed. Most are citing the failure to implement the Medicaid expansion as a problem forcing these decisions.

Mercy has cut staff, a clinic in Baxter Springs, Kansas, has closed (Kansas also did not expand Medicaid), and closer to my area, Barton County passed a property tax to finance the rural hospital.

Proposition A forces family farmers to shoulder the load for keeping the hospital open. All point to lack of Medicaid expansion as part of the problem. So who is paying? Us.

Missouri has agriculture as the No. 1 industry in the state. The Legislature has passed layer upon layer of protection for the agriculture industry, including the who, what, when and how Right to Farm constitutional amendment. However, they have offered little help for the individuals who actually do the work.

Farm income is off up to 56 percent in the past three years. This puts many family farmers in the "Medicaid gap." A household with two earning between \$15,930 and \$21,983 falls into that gap.

They can't get Medicaid and are not eligible for supplemental help in the insurance marketplace.

With the average farmer’s age now 56, the combination of age and income is a real health issue in rural communities. The Legislature protects the industry of agriculture, but denies protection to the people of agriculture.

The reason they point to is the budget, but the federal government will never pay less than 90 percent of the cost.

Another reason Missouri has not acted is mistrust of the federal government to uphold its end of the deal while other states’ residents are benefiting.

Mistrust seems odd as Missouri’s government is one of the last states to pass ethics laws for outgoing legislators.

Many responsible urban families working two jobs also fall in the Medicaid coverage gap (100 percent to 138 percent of the poverty level). They are hardly looking for a handout, but rather a hand back of our tax dollars to help the people of Missouri.

It is time for state politicians to stop the political posturing and do what many states have done. There is no reward for being last, especially when it involves the health of the people of the state you represent.

Rest assured, Missouri taxpayers, your tax dollars provide our legislators with the best health insurance your tax dollars can buy.

Darvin Bentlage is a Barton County farmer.

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