

EDITORIAL

https://www.stltoday.com/opinion/editorial/editorial-missourians-should-use-petitions-to-go-around-lawmakers-on/article_ed258d21-e362-5819-8dfb-1fe367100b68.html

Editorial: Missourians should use petitions to go around lawmakers on Medicaid expansion

By the Editorial Board Jul 24, 2018

SUBSCRIBE FOR 99 CENTS



An estimated 87,000 Missourians who could and should have health care coverage today don't, because of Republican lawmakers' years-long, hyper-partisan campaign in Jefferson City to ensure that the Affordable Care Act fails.

Now, petition-wielding activists in a few other states are charting a path that Missourians of conscience could follow: using ballot measures to get around obstructionist politicians who have until now stymied the expanded coverage that most Americans want.

Obamacare was originally structured to include an expansion of Medicaid, the national health care system for the poor, so that it would cover Americans who make too much money to qualify under the current Medicaid system but not enough to afford even subsidized health insurance.

Unfortunately, the U.S. Supreme Court gave individual states the power to reject Medicaid expansion — something it would seem that no sane state leaders would do, given that expansion represents a massive influx of federal dollars to their economies and lifesaving coverage for some of their most vulnerable citizens.

Yet, years later, Missouri and 13 other states under the thumb of a retrograde ideology have defiantly refused the federal government's attempts to provide financial aid to help fill the coverage gap within their borders. They claim it's about not becoming reliant on money from Washington, but you don't see

anyone turning down federal highway funds on those grounds. It's about the partisan mission of sabotaging

Obamacare, pure and simple, and it remains a singularly shameful abdication of duty to their constituents.

In some of those states today, finally, citizens are saying *enough*. As the Post-Dispatch's Samantha Liss [reported this week](#), Missouri organizers are carefully watching developments in several states:

- Almost 60 percent of Maine voters last year approved Medicaid expansion there. The fight now is to force implementation of the voters' will over the opposition of famously obstinate [Republican Gov. Paul LePage](#).
- Idaho's secretary of state recently certified petitions to put Medicaid expansion on the ballot there, after a [petition effort](#) that most experts had dismissed from the beginning as futile.
- Nebraska activists needed 85,000 signatures to put a Medicaid-expansion measure on the ballot there. They gathered more than 133,000.
- In red-as-it-gets Utah, not only has a Medicaid-expansion measure won [enough signatures](#) to get on the ballot this year, but [recent polling](#) shows it has the support of almost two-thirds of the population.

"Perhaps the ground might be softening," Jen Bersdale, executive director of Missouri Health Care for All, told the Post-Dispatch.

Here's hoping she's right. It's too late for this November, but Missourians who believe health care is a basic human right that shouldn't be left to the mercy of partisans and ideologues should start organizing those petition drives now, with an eye toward 2020.