

Oh, Florida

by William A. Jacobson February 21, 2013

Governor Rick Scott expressed his support this afternoon for expansion of Florida's Medicaid program, describing the decision as a choice between "having Floridians pay to fund this program in other states while denying health care to our citizens — or using federal funding to help some of the poorest in our state with the Medicaid program as we explore other health-care reforms."

The decision is a major reversal for Scott, whose 2010 electoral victory derived largely from his fight against the Obama health law. It apparently came after furious lobbying by Florida conservatives and Scott allies to keep him from breaking ranks....

Michael Tanner, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, says he's skeptical Florida will receive its promised money.

"Trusting in federal promises to give you money in the future is pure fools gold," he tells me. "If Governor Scott hasn't noticed, we've got a budget problem in Washington, and I'd expect Medicaid to be on the table when it comes time to cut. In fact, we already know that the Obama administration put a cut in Medicaid on the table briefly during cliff negotiations."

Scott's statement appeared to acknowledge this possibility.

"Legislation we would support would sunset after three years and [would] need to be reauthorized," the governor said. "It would also sunset if the federal government backed away from their 100 percent commitment during this period." However, Scott added, "I want to be clear that we will not simply deny new Medicaid recipients health insurance three years from now."

Scott may face resistance in the Florida House. “The Florida Legislature will make the ultimate decision,” said Speaker Will Weatherford in a news release responding to Scott’s decision. “I am personally skeptical that this inflexible law will improve the quality of health care in our state and ensure our long-term financial stability,” Weatherford stated.