

Conservative groups gather in Lincoln to assail health care law

By [KEVIN O'HANLON / Lincoln Journal Star](#) JournalStar.com | Posted: Wednesday, July 18, 2012

Representatives of three conservative groups -- Americans for Prosperity-Nebraska, the Platte Institute for Economic Research and the CATO Institute -- gathered at the Capitol on Wednesday to praise efforts by Republican Gov. Dave Heineman to resist implementing President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act.

Heineman and several other Republican governors have said they will reject the law's Medicaid expansion because they fear its costs will be unsustainable.

"We are here today because Nebraska state government is our last line of defense from the president's disastrous health care law," said Brad Stevens, state director for Americans for Prosperity-Nebraska.

Medicaid is the federal-state health insurance program for the poor. It mostly covers children, mothers and disabled people. But under the Affordable Care Act, 15 million uninsured low-income people -- primarily adults without children -- would get Medicaid coverage. The federal government would pay the entire cost of that for the first three years, then the federal share would drop to 90 percent.

But Heineman and some governors have said they fear the federal share will further diminish.

"We are here today to applaud Gov. Heineman's leadership in rejecting the Medicaid expansion program that would have bankrupted our state," Stevens said. "We also call on the governor and our Unicameral to refuse implementing a health care exchange."

Last year, Nebraska received a \$5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to help establish Affordable Insurance Exchanges -- one-stop marketplaces where consumers can choose a private health insurance plan that fits their needs. The health care exchanges were created when Obama signed the Affordable Care Act into law.

The state-level health care exchanges, which will not be in place until 2014, are meant to help people and small businesses buy affordable private health insurance. The exchanges are meant to offer a choice of health insurance plans, establish common rules for things such as pricing and help consumers understand their options.

"Nebraska setting up a state health care exchange would be all pain, no gain," said Michael Tanner, a senior fellow at the CATO Institute. "The states would have little to no control over health care exchanges. The federal bureaucracy retains the right to veto state health care exchange rules. All rules and regulations are subject to approval by the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

"Nebraska would be operating a state health care exchange in name only, the feds would still be pulling the strings," he said. "Nebraska would bear the cost of operating the exchange, passing on the cost to taxpayers or policy holders."

The comments came ahead of a news conference scheduled for Thursday at the Capitol by several groups supporting the ACA, including the Nebraska Hospital Association; the Center For Rural Affairs; Voices For Children in Nebraska; the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network; AARP; the Health Care Association of Nebraska; the Nebraska AIDS Project and the Center For People In Need.

Those groups say the ACA will help at least 50,000 uninsured Nebraskans get coverage.

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