



# Medicaid Expansion Damages Corbett Reelection Bid

By Elizabeth Stelle  
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In the Republican wave election that swept the nation in November, Pennsylvania Republicans increased their majority in the State House of Representatives to a 60-year high and added to their majority in the state Senate. Missing from the list of Republican victories in Pennsylvania was Gov. Tom Corbett, however, who lost his reelection bid by ten points.

One reason for Corbett's election day shortfall, according to health policy expert Michael Cannon of the Cato Institute and others, was Medicaid expansion.

"Republicans who tried to implement Obamacare, like Pennsylvania Gov. Corbett, depressed their base," Cannon concluded after the election.

Initially Corbett refused to expand the program, but pressure from government union leaders and others prompted him to develop a compromise approach called "Healthy PA."

## **Expansion Becomes Political Liability**

Corbett's proposal included an Arkansas-style Medicaid expansion waiver to put new enrollees into Obamacare exchanges. In return for expanding Medicaid and adding about \$2 billion in state spending by 2022, the governor sought higher co-pays for inappropriate emergency room use, monthly premiums on a sliding scale, and work requirements.

The Obama administration eventually approved a watered-down version of the proposal, which Corbett accepted. This middle-ground approach, however, failed to appease his critics, including public-sector union leaders who continued to criticize him. Unions were among the largest financial supporters of his opponent, Tom Wolf.

For example, even after Healthy PA was announced, the advocacy group Keystone Progress claimed Corbett was killing four Pennsylvanians every day he refused to expand Medicaid. Another union-funded group—the Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center—criticized Corbett on the grounds Healthy PA would cost more than traditional expansion.

Meanwhile, the governor's political base of conservative Republicans opposed it as well, cutting into his vote total and contributing to his defeat.

“Medicaid expansion completely depressed the GOP base—it was one more nail in the coffin,” said Anna McCauslin, director of policy for the free-market group Americans for Prosperity Pennsylvania. “Every GOP Senator that won last Tuesday won on repealing Obamacare.”