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New coalition seeks to expand Medicaid in Utah

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Nearly a dozen nonprofit organizations have formed a coalition aimed at prodding Gov. Gary Herbert to make more low-income adults eligible for Medicaid.

Calling itself the Coalition for a Compassionate Utah, the group gathered outside the Governor's Mansion on Friday in a show of support for expanding Medicaid.

Organizers say the expansion would provide basic health coverage to some 123,000 Utah adults who currently are not eligible for Medicaid. Utah has 400,000 uninsured.

The unusual coalition consists of Voices for Utah Children, Utahns Against Hunger, Planned Parenthood, Utah Parents Against Gun Violence, Equality Utah, the Sierra Club, HEAL Utah, Utah Votes, the League of Women Voters and Utah's AFL-CIO.

"For most of these groups, this has nothing to do with their mission," Maryann Martindale, executive director of Alliance for a Better Utah, told The Salt Lake Tribune. "But there are a lot of us out there frustrated by the immovability of our Legislature and governor, and we thought we should stand up and say, 'Look, this affects everybody.'"

A spokesman for Herbert said he remains undecided as he is trying to strike a "proper balance" between helping the most vulnerable and being responsible with tax money.

The governor's office told KUTV-TV that its comments from the public over the last three months are running overwhelmingly in favor of Medicaid expansion _ 1,423 for it and 23 against.

Medicaid expansion is part of a strategy to ensure nearly all Americans have health insurance under the new federal health care law. It was designed to cover the neediest uninsured people yet became optional for states because of a Supreme Court decision.

Many GOP-led states opposed to "Obamacare" have declined the expansion, despite the U.S. government promising to cover the entire cost for the first three years and 90 percent later. Michigan recently became the seventh state led by a Republican governor to expand Medicaid,

and just the third where the GOP also controls the Legislature _ joining Arizona and North Dakota.