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Op-Ed: Our coalition shows breadth of support for Medicaid expansion

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Medicaid expansion is the topic du jour, and with good reason. Nearly 123,000 Utahns will have access to health care if Gov. Gary Herbert accepts Medicaid expansion in Utah.

And if he doesn't? According to the state's own research, we'll lose out on more than 3,000 new jobs and \$2.2 billion in economic impact throughout the state. The evidence falls increasingly on the side of accepting Medicaid expansion. However, we're still waiting for Herbert to act.

A growing number of Utahns, tired of waiting on the governor, are speaking with increasing intensity on the need to expand Medicaid in Utah. One such group, of which we're founding members, is the Coalition for a Compassionate Utah.

As Salt Lake Tribune reporter Kirsten Stewart noted, the coalition includes the "usual suspects" like Voices for Utah Children, but also an enigmatic collection of unusual groups. In fact, the collection is so unusual that Stewart has called our little coalition an "odd alliance."

We couldn't be happier with the moniker. That's because we've brought organizations together as diverse as the Alliance for a Better UTAH, AFL-CIO, Equality Utah, and the League of Women Voters of Utah. Even though none of these organizations have a unique focus on Medicaid expansion, we've recognized that our combined focus includes this vitally important value: compassion.

More and more we're learning that real change will only come to Utah when individuals and organizations are willing to reach out of their comfort zones and start collaborating with each other. In fact, the Coalition for a Compassionate Utah recently received positive attention from NonProfit Quarterly, a research-based management journal oriented toward practitioners. According to NPQ, unusual coalitions like ours — that are willing to rally around common issues that aren't necessarily unique to our own missions — are key to effective activism. This is the future.

Why have so many groups with such disparate missions signed on to creating the Coalition for a Compassionate Utah? We see two answers to this question.

First, Medicaid expansion, because it is not a unique element of any one of our missions, becomes an important cause for all of our organizations. We see this as an opportunity to play wingman to the various organizations, like Utahns Against Hunger and Voices for Utah Children, who spend most of their resources advocating for the very least among us. Just as individuals are encouraged to give back during the holiday season, as nonprofits committed to a variety of issues, we see the Coalition for a Compassionate Utah as an opportunity to give back.

Second, the oft-joined problems of health and poverty cut across each of our issues. Environmentalists who are out of work (Sierra Club) need health care just as much as poor LGBT Utahns (Equality Utah) or young mothers (Planned Parenthood). Medicaid expansion cuts across the unique missions of each of our organizations, providing an opportunity to show both the Governor and our state legislature the significance of private-sector groups working together on issues that can make Utah a more compassionate place.

Maryann Martindale, Alliance for a Better UTAH; Allan Smart, Gandhi Alliance for Peace; Christopher Thomas, HEAL Utah; Jenn Gonnely, League of Women Voters of Utah; Brandie Balken, Equality Utah; Karrie Galloway, Planned Parenthood Action Council; Mark Clemons, Utah Chapter, Sierra Club; Miriam Hyde, Utah Disability Caucus; Gina Cornia, Utahns Against Hunger.

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