



# The Daily Star-Journal

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March 18

WARRENSBURG

## **Business and health care community members applauded Gov. Jay Nixon's call to expand Medicaid. By: Jack 'Miles' Ventimiglia, Star-Journal Editor**

The Monday before Nixon's arrival in the city Friday, the Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce issued a statement favoring expansion. Chamber Chairman David Less said shortly after Nixon spoke that the chamber's endorsement received civic support.

"The feedback that we've had thus far has been positive," Less said. "They think it's the right thing to do for the community. We've gotten a lot of good feedback from the University of Central Missouri proud that we came to this decision; also, from the medical center."

Less said the chamber board did not reach the decision lightly.

"It was not an easy process to come to, and we had a few different meetings to really try to get to the best conclusion on this," Less said. "We thought it was the best thing to do as a board."

Nixon greeted University of Central Missouri Nursing Department students, a department teacher, and a representative of an area health care group.

Nursing student Rebecca Morrison, 21, Gladstone, supports expansion, but said she is concerned about what could happen to Missouri's ailing mental health program if state lawmakers reject the money.

"It could potentially cut psychiatric services, communities are put at risk, more problems for law enforcement and fewer jobs," Morrison said.

Nursing student Jessica Carter, 21, Holden, said expansion would mean employment.

"It will add more jobs for Missouri, and if we don't expand it, there will be fewer jobs," she said. "Safety's the Number 1 priority for health care and if we don't add the jobs, then there will be fewer people trying to take care of all these patients."

Nursing student Kolby Nicholson, 20, Marshall Junction, Mo., said patients are her focus.

"It's all about patients and we want to give the best care to our patients, and if there's not enough staff then we're not going to be able to give staff exactly what they need," she said.

Assistant professor Allison Norwood said expansion means more help versus the status quo and reduced help.

"If it's not expanded, then you run the risk of closing hospitals, closing wings on hospitals," she said.

The program, funded federally 100 percent, drops to 90 percent on a phased-in basis by 2020.

"Hopefully we can find some additional funding, and we can prove why it is beneficial to do that to have the Medicaid expansion. If it gets cut, then we're in the same boat we are in right now in seeking a way to provide care to patients."

Nursing student Tiffany Bell, 32, Knob Noster, said she likes aspects of the plan, but has concerns.

"I like that it's going to bring more jobs. That's definitely going to stimulate the economy, which is good. Medicaid is an important asset for those people who can't afford it," Bell said, with her concern focusing on numbers: whether the number of health care providers needed can keep pace with the estimated 300,000 people who would be added to the system if Medicaid expands in Missouri. "I don't want the quality of care to go down just because it's been expanded overuse and abuse."

When entering the nursing field, Bell said, she has a plan for dealing with any overuse or abuse that she might encounter: "Stand up."

West Central Independent Living Solutions Executive Director Kathy Kay said her organization came out in support of Medicaid Expansion.

"We support it for two reasons one, because it's not only the right thing to do but it's also the right economic choice for Missouri," Kay said.

The state is set to lose money used to reimburse hospitals for uninsured people, she said.

"Without the Medicaid expansion, the hospitals are really going to take a huge hit. They're going to have to cut some services," Kay said.

Medicaid expansion could keep sick people, including the working poor, from becoming seriously ill and passing on their medical bills to taxpayers, she said.

"Preventative care is what Medicaid expansion is going to increase, and if you've got better preventative care it saves money in the long run you have people that are healthier," Kay said, later adding, "You can go in and find out that you have high cholesterol or high blood pressure ... and go have the stent put in."

Right now, many face the alternative, she said.

"You have the major heart attack and then (you're) uninsured. ... Now you're bankrupt, or the hospital's eating your cost," Kay said.

Almost all West Central Independent Living Solutions clients use Medicaid, Kay said.

"We have people that have to go to Kansas City because you can't get any reimbursement here," Kay said. "They have to go sometimes all day long. They can't drive, so they have to be transported. It's going to make it harder for them to get the preventative care they need if we don't increase this."

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