

LEGISLATURE 2013  JAN. 8 - APRIL 7
Backers rally for Medicaid

Supporters call on lawmakers to favor expansion

By Jimmie E. Gates

jgates@jackson.gannett.com

Expanding Medicaid is just as important to the state as borrowing \$100 million to help expand Nissan, a religious leader said Wednesday. “This is an investment in people,” the Rev. Steve Casteel, president of the Mississippi Religious Leadership Conference, said of expanding Medicaid.

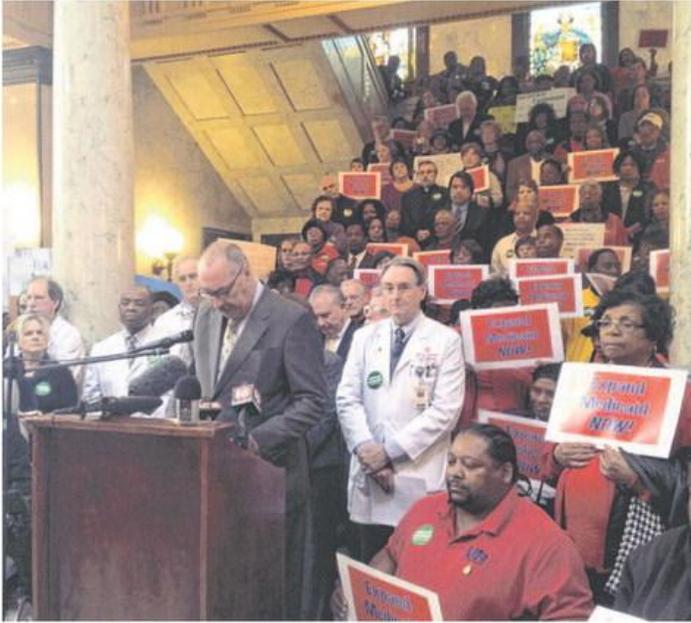
Casteel called on lawmakers and the governor to set aside partisan politics and expand the state federal health-care program. He said it may be a financial challenge for the state, but it’s worth it to see an estimated 300,000 additional working poor have access to health care.

A crowd of about 200 people, including physicians and health-care advocates, gathered Wednesday at the Capitol to rally for expanding Medicaid as part of the federal Affordable Care Act.

Dr. Robert Brahan of the Mississippi chapter of American College of Physicians said: “Sick people need Medicaid, and we are the most unhealthy state in the nation.”

Sam Cameron, president of the Mississippi Hospital Association, said at the rally that “it’s time to put people over politics.”

See MEDICAID, Page 4A



A crowd of about 200 people, including physicians and health care advocates, gathered Wednesday at the Capitol to rally for expanding Medicaid as part of the federal Affordable Care Act. GEOFF PENDER/THE CLARION-LEDGER

Article Continued Below

See MEDICAID on Page A004

Medicaid

Continued from Page 1A

“We represent over 100 hospitals in the state with over 90,000 employees,” Cameron said. “We support Medicaid expansion and have consistently said we support Medicaid expansion ... It’s time to put citizens over politics.”

People held signs saying “Expand Medicaid Now” and “(House) Speaker (Philip) Gunn: Mississippi Deserves a debate and vote on Medicaid expansion.”

Gov. Phil Bryant, Gunn and Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves say it will cost the state too much to expand Medicaid by up to 300,000. The federal government promises to foot the bill for expansion from 2014-2017, and 90 percent from that point to 2020, but state officials have said they are concerned about the federal government keeping the promise, and they worry about what will happen after 2020. Bryant has said one study reports it will cost the state from \$600 million to \$1 billion to expand. But supporters said the state will receive some \$11 billion in federal dollars, and it will lead to 9,000 jobs and help state revenue.

Gunn said Wednesday he hasn’t prevented any vote on Medicaid. He said Democrats in the House killed the only Medicaid bill. But Democratic lawmakers said the bill didn’t include the code section to allow Medicaid expansion, and counter that Gunn and the House GOP leadership

killed a Senate bill that did.

As some other GOP governors are backing off their stance against expanding Medicaid, Bryant has appeared to be digging in, even saying he'd sue the federal government if payments to hospitals are cut.

The Mississippi Legislature is in a standoff. House Democrats want to expand it to cover hundreds of thousands of the working poor in the state, per Obamacare. The GOP leadership opposes expansion.

Each side has killed measures to reauthorize Medicaid to operate for the coming year. Each side at this point lacks the number of votes to win the day.

There are currently more than 640,000 Mississippians, of a total population of about 3 million, covered by Medicaid.

Currently, working low-income parents can make up to 44 percent of the federal poverty level, about \$5,000 for an individual or \$10,000 for a family of four, and qualify for Medicaid.

Under the Affordable Care Act, dubbed Obamacare, people making up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level, or \$15,000 a year for an individual and \$32,000 for a family of four, would be eligible.

To contact Jimmie E. Gates, call (601) 961-7212. He is @jgatesnews on Twitter.