

# Medicaid expansion talk key in Fla. governors race

Kelli Kennedy 11:53 p.m. EDT August 9, 2014



(Photo: AP)

FORT LAUDERDALE – Expanding Medicaid to an additional 1 million Floridians under President Barack Obama’s new health law is turning into one of the biggest issues of this year’s gubernatorial race.

Former Gov. Charlie Crist brings up the topic on most campaign stops and says one of the first things he’ll do if elected is call a special session to expand Medicaid. His opponent, incumbent Republican Gov. Rick Scott, seems to be waning in his support.

Scott says he’s open to taking roughly \$51 billion over the next decade from the federal government, but only as long as Florida taxpayers aren’t left with the bill.

In a surprise move two years ago, Scott made an emotional speech, saying that Medicaid expansion was a compassionate, common-sense choice. But he never put his full political weight behind the issue and the Legislature rejected expansion under the Affordable Care Act.

Scott has since backed away from his position, telling MSNBC earlier this year: “I said while the federal government is going to pay 100 percent, I won’t stand in the way of the Legislature wanting to do more. But the Legislature made the decision ... not to go forward.”

A spokesman for Scott said Saturday that the governor’s position has not changed, but emphasized he believes Florida should only expand Medicaid if it does not cost state taxpayers.

“The governor often thinks about Florida families who deal with the challenges his family faced growing up ... Gov. Scott wants to provide the most people possible with access to high quality, affordable care,” Scott spokesman Greg Blair said in a statement.

Earlier this week, Crist, a Republican-turned-Democrat, said he would work with the GOP-controlled Legislature and urge them “to forget about the party affiliations and do what’s right for our fellow Floridians ... we can get it done and we owe it to them.”

Crist also said he’d use any tools at his disposal, adding he’s not afraid to use the budget line-item veto if necessary.

Expanding Medicaid has also been politically divisive between the Sunshine State and the federal government. Scott needed approval from federal health officials to expand a Medicaid privatization program. Lengthy negotiation ensued. Some experts predicted that if the feds approved the program that Scott would come out in favor of Medicaid expansion — a tenet of Obama’s health law.

The feds approved statewide privatization, a victory for state Republicans, but Medicaid expansion was virtually a non-starter during this past Legislative session.

Scott’s spokesman lauded Florida’s Medicaid privatization program as historic and said Medicaid grew “at three and a half times our general revenue and Charlie Crist did nothing to help make it more sustainable when he was in office.”

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