



## Beshear's 'Bad-Aid' replaced with some serious stitches

By Jim Waters

Gov. Steve Beshear's deer-in-the-headlights approach to [Kentucky's Medicaid](#) crisis on one hand leads to him claiming to have saved only \$86 million in Medicaid spending this year, while on the other hand quietly seeking a waiver from one of the "Obamacare" mandates that comes with no money to pay for it.

Even if Beshear's \$86 million in Medicaid savings existed — an "if" bigger than the federal deficit — it still falls \$39 million short of what his administration promised during the last budget go-around. And that's just for the fiscal year ending June 30.

Beshear promised \$250 million in savings for the current two-year budget. On top of that, his administration pledged significant progress on moving Kentucky's Medicaid team toward a score of \$425 million in savings through managed-care contracts.

Instead, the administration called an audible and asked lawmakers to pull nearly \$167 million from next year's Medicaid budget to plug this year's hole — without spending cuts. Instead, they promised: We'll find savings through efficient management — next year.

Indeed, "It's like déjà vu all over again," Yogi Berra said.

What's different this time is that lawmakers grabbed the football, decided to grind out yardage down the field toward the end zone — where freedom for Kentuckians from Washington's mostly unpaid-for mandates awaits.

Kentucky Senate's play: Rather than trust this administration to fill Medicaid gaps with savings, the Appropriations and Revenue Committee went hunting and found about \$54 million in savings of budgeted, but unused, funds in various accounts, and proposed 2.26-percent across-the-board cuts next year to pay the remaining \$100 million.

Without modest spending cuts this year, much deeper reductions could be made next year.

It's a responsible move by the Senate. If the governor's pipe dream of savings goes up in smoke, taxpayers and Kentucky's most needy residents — those relying on Medicaid for lifesaving treatment and medicine — shouldn't be left staring disaster or death in the face.

Beshear and his Attorney General Jack Conway's call: Time out.

The governor must have some heavy campaign contributors among the few insurers remaining in Kentucky after [a disastrous attempt in the 1990s at government-run health care](#). He recently requested, through an e-mail by insurance commissioner Sharon Clark to Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, an exemption for Kentucky insurers from Obamacare's requirement of proof that 80 percent of premiums get spent on medical services.

Amazingly, Clark mentioned the fiasco known as “Kentucky Kare” in her Feb. 16 e-mail, noting: “Kentucky’s individual marketplace remains fragile and in recovery after a previous health reform effort in the 1990s.”

Knowing how much Clark finds satisfaction in saddling Kentucky insurers with regulations — as most longtime government bureaucrats do — her e-mail recalling the failure of that play called two decades ago likely was written with clenched teeth.

She probably hoped word wouldn’t get out about the request.

After all, Team Beshear knows full well how attached this commonwealth is to D.C.’s teat and how ticking off their White House Pal-In-Chief might reduce the thickness of the Obama Express-delivered gravy that sends more than \$1.50 back from the federal government for every dollar Kentucky taxpayers send to Washington.

In fact, Beshear’s administration isn’t big on letting anyone know what’s going on when it really matters.

For example, some lawmakers would like to know why the Beshear administration spent nearly \$67 million more than the nearly \$130 million in the last budget on debt restructuring, which amounts to putting off debt payments or making a big balloon payment on a loan.

How many Kentuckians in this tight economy would like to have the chance to do that?

Senators also would like to know what the administration spent the money for.

Don’t hold your breath.

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