

Saturday, January 8, 2005

# THE HUTCHINSON NEWS

online edition

## Western Front

### Revamp Medicaid

The Dec. 18 article "Budget discussions expected to dominate legislative session" showed that legislators have their work cut out for them this session. While education funding might be on the top of everyone's minds, a larger problem looms in the background: Medicaid.

Rep. Bob Bethell explains in the article that "spending on social services in the state budget increased by 30 percent over the last four years, while education jumped only 6 percent." Such a rate of growth is unsustainable.

As the new year begins, state leaders in Kansas may be able to benefit from recent experience of another government that is trying to fix its troubled health care program: Russia. In a recent policy change, the Russian government is moving toward a new system where cash grants to beneficiaries will replace remnants of the Soviet welfare state, including health care.

In its current form, Kansas Medicaid is actuarially bankrupt, producing low-quality care and falling victim of fraud and abuse. From ordering unnecessary tests under Medicaid's fee for service system to nursing homes being paid for costs instead of the services they provide, and to outright theft, the plan is an unmitigated failure.

Medicaid reform should focus on incorporating the Russian model - providing direct cash to beneficiaries to spend on their health and support needs. Similar "cash and counseling" programs in Florida, New Jersey and Arkansas have proven both cost-effective and popular, with satisfaction rates exceeding 90 percent.

By putting funds in the hands of beneficiaries, Kansas can improve the quality of Medicaid while controlling costs. Broken programs must be reformed. The Russians acted because they could no longer afford to ignore an unsustainable system, and Kansans must do the same.

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