

Post Register Commentary: In Memory of Jenny Steinke



By Jerry and Carrie Scheid
Posted: December 6, 2015

Carrie: I feel badly about the tragic death of Jenny Steinke.

Jerry: So do I. What's troubling is she died needlessly because she didn't have health insurance to cover the cost of treating her asthma before it became fatal.

Carrie: Like 78,000 other "working poor" Idahoans, Jenny's family fell into the "Medicaid gap." They make too much to qualify for Medicaid but not enough to qualify for federal subsidies through Obamacare. Our state legislature could fix this but, so far, have refused to do so.

Jerry: It doesn't make sense. Covering the Medicaid gap would save Idaho \$173 million over the next ten years by eliminating the county and state catastrophic funds, etc. That money could be used instead for roads, bridges, education and tax relief.

Carrie: Our legislative leaders don't seem to care about the money savings. They are afraid that accepting federal money to pay health coverage for the working poor would make Idaho weak and dependent.

Jerry: Interestingly, our Legislature doesn't mind accepting a very generous health insurance package for their own families, paid for by us taxpayers.

Carrie: Although they serve only a few months each year, they are treated as full-time employees for insurance purposes. The most popular plan costs them only \$171/month and covers their entire family with only a \$750 deductible.

Jerry: I hope their plan includes psychiatric care?

Carrie: Actually it does.

Jerry: Wow! I bet there are a lot of low income families who would like that package!

Carrie: Unfortunately, any kind of affordable plan for the working poor is being blocked by the House and Senate leadership. Specifically, House Speaker Scott Bedke and Majority Leader Mike Moyle are adamantly opposed to accepting federal dollars to solve this problem.

Jerry: Well, you have to admire their nerve. On the one hand, they won't accept federal dollars to provide health coverage for the working poor. But their other hand is outstretched for federal money for their own personal benefit.

Carrie: What do you mean?

Jerry: According to USDA figures provided to the Environmental Working Group website www.farm.ewg.org, Speaker Bedke and his family's Winecup ranch has received over \$459,000 in federal farm subsidies since 1995. That doesn't include the subsidized federal grazing a large operation like his uses to run cattle.

Carrie: Hmmm....and House Majority Leader Mike Moyle has received over \$181,000 in federal farm subsidies.

Jerry: That's only the tip of the iceberg. Since 1995, other eastern Idaho legislators with both feet in the federal subsidy trough include Rep. Tom Loertscher whose family farm businesses have received over \$684,000, Rep. Dell Reybould whose family farm businesses have received over \$837,000 and Sen. Jeff Siddoway whose farm and livestock business has received over \$1 million.

Carrie: Yikes! That kind of money would buy a lot of health coverage for Idaho's working poor.

Jerry: Is there anything we average citizens can do to change their minds?

Carrie: Grassroots pressure! Sending an email asking our legislative leaders to close the Medicaid gap would help. In addition, Senate Pro Tem Brent Hill is speaking at the IF City Club on Dec. 10th , noon at University Place. It's open to the public. I encourage folks to attend and urge Senator Hill to resolve this. Go to www.ifcityclub.com

Jerry: Clearly this problem demands "endless pressure, endlessly applied" by the citizens of Idaho.

How to help:

Please contact Idaho's legislative leaders below and ask them to cover the Medicaid gap this session.

- Governor Butch Otter, governor@gov.idaho.gov or call 208-334-2100
- House Speaker Scott Bedke. sbedke@house.idaho.gov
- House Majority Leader Mike Moyle, mmoyle@house.idaho.gov
- Senate Pro Tem Brent Hill, bhill@senate.idaho.gov
- Senate Majority Leader Bart Davis, bmdavis@senate.idaho.gov

Jerry is a retired farmer/rancher and native Idahoan. Carrie is a retired nonprofit administrator. They live in Idaho Falls.