

House editorial: An offer to Wayne Hoffman

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It is one thing to assert that too much reliance on government support is a bad thing.

Wayne Hoffman of the Idaho Freedom Foundation took it a step farther on this page last week, proposing that churches and charity will step in where government leaves off when it comes to creating and maintaining a healthcare safety net.

Some might say that Hoffman's idea sounds very much like the position of railroad baron George Frederick Baer, who infamously wrote more than a century ago: "The rights and interests of the laboring man will be protected and cared for... by the Christian men of property to whom God in His infinite wisdom has given the control of the property interests of the country."

We choose, instead, to take him at his word. Since it's clear that no other solutions are forthcoming, let's get behind Hoffman and his supporters to solve our healthcare mess by relying on the kindness of the wealthy. Idahoans don't favor simply letting the poor starve or die of treatable illnesses. But we have in place a checkerboard of state and federal programs that leaves huge gaps, as this newspaper and others have documented. While there is no history to indicate that churches and charities alone can fill those gaps, perhaps Hoffman knows something we don't.

Despite the sound conservative basis for expanding Medicaid – it would result in a net reduction in government spending on indigent healthcare – our legislative leaders have made it clear it's not going to happen. As things stand now in Idaho, we wait until uninsured persons show up in an emergency room to pay for their treatment. There is no more expensive way to provide healthcare.

If the government isn't going to step in sooner, we offer Hoffman and those who agree him this challenge – put your theory to the test. Create your healthcare charities, work with churches and raise the millions of dollars necessary to provide this most basic of human needs. We will write about your efforts every step of the way, providing free promotional support and encouragement.

At the same time, this newspaper will once again suggest that Medicaid expansion should be among the top priorities. We are under no illusions – it won't happen. Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter has recommended a partial step that solves almost nothing, and that is likely to be the best we'll get, if that. So, let's at least acknowledge where we're at – barring a grass roots effort favored by Hoffman, Idaho's most vulnerable will continue to suffer and some will die. There are other solutions available, but none that has consensus support. So, Mr. Hoffman, the ball is in your court. We stand ready to tell the story.

Roger Plothow