OPINION

Deadly Medicaid Debacle

Literally killing poor people who could have health care, while refusing to give Virginia’s economy a boost.

The poor people of Virginia are so seriously harmed by the actions of the Virginia General Assembly in refusing to expand Medicaid at little additional cost to the Commonwealth that those harmed should have some legal recourse. The damage will cost many lives and the productivity of many. People who will needlessly die of cancer undetected until it is too late. People whose productive lives will be cut short because of untreated diabetes. People who will finally qualify for Medicare and Medicaid because they are permanently disabled after stroke or heart attack that could have been prevented.

Examples of health harm beyond the poor: There are the extra flu cases because a working person who doesn’t have health insurance so doesn’t get a flu shot also can’t afford to be off work and infects other by being at work while sick.

With whopping cough on the rise, people who will be around infants are advised to get a booster shot to protect the infants for whom the disease can be deadly, but if you don’t have health coverage, you are unlikely to get the booster.

Vulnerable people, elderly, young children, people with chronic illness, people on chemotherapy, will get sick more than necessary even though they have insurance because of the 200,000-plus people integrated in all aspects of our communities who do not have access to basic health care.

Meanwhile, leaders lament the loss of federal dollars in Virginia due to the sequencer and reduced spending on defense, homeland security and other programs.

Here is the one place where Virginia’s economy could get a boost. Expanding Medicaid would create an estimated 30,000 jobs and pump hundreds of millions of dollars into Virginia’s economy. Hospitals support expanding Medicaid which would offset many of the costs of caring for uninsured populations. So far, Virginia has lost out on about $1 billion that could be creating jobs and making our local economy healthier in addition to protecting health in our communities.

Business groups and chambers of commerce around Virginia, including the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce, support the expansion of Medicaid in Virginia under the Affordable Care Act.

In Virginia, Medicaid eligibility for adults without disability is almost nonexistent, limited to parents with incomes below 51 percent of poverty, or about $11,900 a year for a family of four, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. Adults without dependent children receive minimal eligibility regardless of their income. Refusing to expand Medicaid is hurting all of us, but the most vulnerable are hurting the most.

— Mary Kimm

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Connecting to End Homelessness

By Kerrie Wilson and Sara Leonard

When the Fairfax-Falls Church Partnership and Fairfax County Board of Supervisors declared a bold goal of ending homelessness, we knew the steepest hill to climb would be securing affordable housing in a high cost-of-living area with an inadequate supply. Beyond that, the need to identify and align a broad range of services and supports to address the underlying cause of one’s homelessness and to prevent it in the future.

Equally important, and unique to the Fairfax plan, was the recognition that this could not be just another government-nonprofit initiative. To prevent and end homelessness in a “community” the size of Fairfax County would require us to engage that community in new ways, not just for immediate resources and support, but in a committed, sustainable campaign to reach that goal.

Connecting people to other members of the community and to the resources that enable them to achieve stability is the core of Cornerstones’ mission. Addressing homelessness requires building relationships of trust between community groups, often with disparate views about the other. In the early years of the founding of Reston and Reston Interfaith (now Cornerstones), it was Embruck Rucker who brought people together around this cause and the eventual dedication of a homeless shelter in Reston’s town center. Cornerstones has continued in that role, as the vision that Reston and community will join us in ending homelessness, not just managing it. Cornerstones has confronted challenges in building that understanding many times over the years.

In 2013, we were alerted to issues of concern being voiced in the Hunters Woods Shopping Plaza about crime and safety, and the perception that these issues were related to homeless individuals gathering there. We were aware of their presence, and that these men and women were made welcome to stay on the property of Christ the Servant Lutheran Church and to utilize facilities at the Reston Community Center that reflect the community-minded missions of those institutions.

But other members of the community had different perceptions. The public displays of drunkenness, vulgar behaviors, and occasional aggressiveness. That linkage is not altogether unfounded, but it is not the entire story either. According to Kathe DeFeo, the Crime Prevention Officer based in Reston, the number of reported incidents over the last year involving homeless individuals was very low; rather, they tended to involve disaffected young men under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

How could Cornerstones help in this situation and address the feelings of discontent and insecurity that exist within the community? By connecting people.

Working with the church and community center, we convened a meeting with area residents and homeless persons, business owners, plaza developers, community representatives, local police and the Office to Prevent and End Homelessness.

Over the course of the year, Cornerstones has facilitated broader community meetings, thereby creating opportunities for interest groups to meet face to face, voice their concerns, listen to different perspectives, and make suggestions for how to improve relations. The momentum of the neighborhood meetings has encouraged members to think of new ways to engage, connect, and commit to playing a part in making Hunters Woods a stronger community. A code of conduct was developed with all stakeholders, laying out benefits and consequences for those visiting the plaza. The church is providing hot lunches for homeless neighbors, with Cornerstones’ outreach worker on site to discuss housing and service options.

The Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board offered volunteer caretaker training in how to approach and support people suffering from mental illness. The police emphasize crime prevention, increasing patrols and response to any call received. Reston Association is focused on improved lighting and rail markings, and the property management company has made significant improvements to the plaza through an extensive redevelopment.

Supervisor Hudgins has been there as a committed partner and to identify additional policies and resources her office can bring. Much still needs to be done. Some people, including elderly residents of the Fellowship House, continue to feel fearful about sharing the plaza based on past experience and despite the development of the tools and procedures that will bring police or Hunters Woods task force members to as See LETTERS, PAGE 9
LETTERS

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Lack of housing near job, school or family? Was it crisis, abuse or illness? Is it your immigration status, age or ability? Was it lack of education or skills?

Imagine the potential if connected stakeholders—faith, business, civic, nonprofit and government—asked these questions a different way. What could we change together? We can end homelessness; will we?

Kerrie Wilson is CEO of Cornerstones
and Sara Leonard Vice Chair of Cornerstones Board of Directors.

Hitting the Ground Running

To the Editor:

Barbara Comstock, a candidate for Congress in the 10th District, has a proven record of getting results. During her time in the Virginia General Assembly she has been able to get bipartisan results by being a leader on helping to create jobs, grow the economy, combat Human Trafficking, bring data centers to the area, and pass the Commonwealth’s first telework laws.

It is not surprising that she is the only candidate who has received business endorsements including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Federation of Inde-

Gail Cope
Fairfax

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