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Health care cuts will leave state in critical condition, foes say



Larry Kolvoord /AMERICAN-STATESMAN

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If the House cuts reimbursement rates by 10 percent, Austin Dr. Guadalupe Zamora —examining longtime patient Martha Pacheco, 77 — might have to stop accepting new Medicaid patients.

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By **Chuck Lindell**
AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

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Deep spending cuts in the recently passed House budget would profoundly change the state's medical system, placing tens of thousands of Texans in the difficult position of finding alternate care from a dwindling list of prospects, health care advocates warn.

Much of the impact would be on elderly Texans, adults with disabilities, those in need of mental health care and low-income families in search of obstetricians, pediatricians and general practitioners. Private insurance rates and hospital-provided care also might be affected.

Even the still-developing Senate budget, which seeks to mitigate many of the deepest cuts, carries a measure of pain that several Republicans rue but feel powerless to prevent.

It adds up to uncertain times for health care providers and patients alike.

"This is devastating, and that's not hyperbole," said Trey Berndt with AARP Texas. "I'm not sure everyone understands how dire the cuts are."

Keeping up with population growth and maintaining current health and human service programs would have cost about \$31 billion in state money in 2012-13.

The House set aside \$22 billion.

About \$1.6 billion was saved with a 10 percent cut in Medicaid reimbursement rates for doctors, hospitals and nursing homes that serve 3.5 million Texans with disabilities or low incomes.

An additional \$4.3 billion was cut from projected cases. But because Medicaid-eligible patients cannot be turned away, the Legislature is expected to return in 2012 or 2013 to pass a supplemental budget to fill the gap.

Medicaid providers fear that if the Legislature doesn't come up with the money, those reimbursement rate cuts will grow far larger, said Eva DeLuna Castro, budget analyst for the liberal-leaning Center for Public Policy Priorities.

Because the need for most medical help will be met somewhere, politicians and advocates describe the health care system as a balloon: Squeeze it here, and it bulges out there.

For example, the House approved a 10 percent cut to Medicaid reimbursement rates for doctors, raising fears that even more physicians will stop participating in the state-federal insurance program.

If that happens, patients without access to doctors can be expected to show up in more expensive emergency rooms with advanced conditions that cost more to treat.

Private insurance rates could rise if hospitals shift higher costs to paying patients, and property taxes could rise if publicly owned hospitals must offset a financial hit.

"There is going to be a ripple effect through the entire health care community," said Tom Banning, chief executive officer of the Texas Academy of Family Physicians. "There will be severe downstream

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consequences."

Or consider proposed cuts to home health services. Without attendants and therapists to help them live at home, elderly Texans may need to move into nursing homes, which can double or triple costs to the state.

But other cuts could force many of the state's nursing homes to close, so where would those people go?

"I'm very fearful," said Roger Peden II, administrator of Stonebridge Health Center, a nursing home west of Austin. "If these cuts go through as proposed, it will be life-altering for seniors in Texas, as well as for medical employees and those who work in and around nursing homes."

At the same time, one-third of the state budget goes toward health and social service programs, and higher costs are anticipated, particularly with the biggest expense: Medicaid.

A study by the conservative Texas Public Policy Foundation projects unsustainable growth for Medicaid, which might consume almost 47 percent of the state budget in 2014-15, up from 28 percent in 2008-09.

"We have some hard choices to make," said Arlene Wohlgenuth, executive director of the foundation. "But we also have a responsibility to keep our economy in as healthy a shape as we can. That affects all Texans."

Already-struggling families cannot be asked to pay more taxes, said Wohlgenuth, a former House member. "I have a lot of sympathy for our legislators, but the message last November continues to be strong that people want reduced spending."

Still, Sen. Bob Deuell, R-Greenville, said recently that "even in my very Republican, conservative district," he's heard support for tapping the state's rainy day fund and raising the gas tax and state fees to cushion the impact of health care cuts.

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[HappyCrappy](#)

Score: -5

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7:27 PM on April 10, 2011

The TEA drinkin elitest republicans could not care less. Lettem all die, is their first thought. Selfish b@\$t@rds, one and all!



[Gregor78704](#)

Score: 2

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6:06 PM on April 10, 2011








Cut the fat!
This will sound harsh, but some people are just going to have to die. Consider it a noble sacrifice to save our union. But people who can't take care of themselves are not fit to live in our society. Fend for themselves. And when a parent sees one of their brood starve to death or die of fever, maybe they'll stop having more.
It is not my responsibility to care for people who are too lazy or defective to take care of themselves. If they don't contribute, cut them loose!



[dutch79](#)

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|--|---------------------------|-----------|--------------|
|  | 4:24 PM on April 10, 2011 | Score: 3 | Report Abuse |
| <p>don't worry obamacare has us covered</p> | | | |
|  | Parent | Score: 5 | Report Abuse |
| <p>4:22 PM on April 10, 2011</p> <p>We should insist that every person that receives aid not have any more children. It is insane to have people that cannot afford to have children make the same choices over and over again. Give these women a choice between getting aid or having their tubes tied. My husband's niece is on kid number 4, and this is her second boyfriend. She will not marry her second boyfriend because she will lose her free daycare and subsidized housing check and Lone Star card etc., I guarantee you she will have baby number 5 in the next 2 years because she doesn't care about how her decisions impact those children already born. Also, her parents have her living in their first house for free. Her father makes a six figure salary. Why can't he pay for her expenses? I guarantee you he'd forget he was Catholic and tie her tubes himself if all these extra expenses came out of his pocket.</p> | | | |
|  | CarlTx | Score: 6 | Report Abuse |
| <p>4:06 PM on April 10, 2011</p> <p>AARP doesn't represent Seniors, they sell Medicare Supplemental Insurance.</p> | | | |
|  | Wh1p1n | Score: 5 | Report Abuse |
| <p>3:54 PM on April 10, 2011</p> <p>I applaud the House for cutting Medicaid but the truth is that even bigger cuts are going to be needed before we can get ourselves out of the financial mess we're in. Everybody knows that the help is not going to come from DC or the democrats who are only in favor of spending even more of our money.</p> <p>1 reply</p> | | | |
|  | CarlTx | Score: 2 | Report Abuse |
| <p>3:37 PM on April 10, 2011</p> <p>Aaron seems blissfully unaware that all the social programs taking it in the shorts right now are A) Democrat spawned and B) in large part federally funded.</p> <p>lys, considering you have advocated blowing up buildings and said you'd support domestic terrorism, your opinion of me is irrelevant. Now complain and flag the post but that's the truth and you know it. You got posts pulled for it.</p> | | | |
|  | Bobby Washington | Score: 2 | Report Abuse |
| <p>3:14 PM on April 10, 2011</p> <p>You don't think the 8-12 million illegals in Texas, most all of whom have their medical expenses paid by Medicare, are creating this problem. Do you?</p> <p>3 replies</p> | | | |
|  | Bruce7 | Score: -2 | Report Abuse |
| <p>3:11 PM on April 10, 2011</p> <p>Still No action to restore the Dollar, End Outsourcing, Mfg. Base-Gainful Jobs, secure the Border-sanction employers-deport illegal aliens, End</p> | | | |

Illegal Wars, Stop taking our Existing Roads and tolling them. Wake-up Neighbors. Both Parties sold you out. Your being hosed. 2 Chr 7:14 Wolves in Sheeps clothing. Matt 7:14-16



lys

Score: -5

3:09 PM on April 10, 2011

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I really wonder where the Bishop of Austin stands on these social issues. I do know he is pro-life and opposes contraceptives, beyond that what are the social teachings of the CC?



chuckster

Score: -1

3:05 PM on April 10, 2011

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It's time to tax churches and other religious institutions the same as any other business. We should be able to make a dent in the deficits by seeing to it that megachurch pastors getting quarter-million dollar allowances for their multi-million dollar "parsonages" and private jets pay their fair share. Get all that money and real estate on the tax rolls just like anyone else. Render unto Caesar and all that other stuff Jesus talked about that they conveniently rebel against.

<http://bit.ly/9dWLif>
<http://bit.ly/aZlDs5>

If you and/or your church can afford to fly a personal jet from Fort Worth to Tyler instead of drive the 100 or so miles in a car, your racket can afford to pay the same taxes as anyone else.

5 replies



CarITx

Score: 2

2:34 PM on April 10, 2011

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All you little flapping lefties crack me up.. you were the ones running around DEMANDING the Feds get involved in every aspect of our lives, you're the ones who swallowed the Federal BS hook line and sinker and now when your precious Feds ran out of other people's money all you can do is blame Republicans.

1 reply



CarITx

Score: 2

2:30 PM on April 10, 2011

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This is the inevitable result of depending on someone else's money.. once it dries up, everyone runs around whining. Want someone to blame this on? Blame the greedy politicians who sucked up to the Feds and all their BS. Now, the feds are broke.

Local or state funding is the solution. Period. Cut out the federal BS.



AaronTX

Score: -1

2:00 PM on April 10, 2011

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What I don't understand with all these cuts is why they can't be done evenly. OK, there's less revenue and we've ruled out raising taxes. Fine. Cut EVERY SINGLE THING the government does by whatever percentage it would take to get us back in the black. No program is spared, but also no program is eliminated. That means cutting health care, schools, but also the TX enterprise fund, national guard, road maintenance, governor and legislators' salaries, meter maids, everything. It wouldn't be pretty, but it would be fair.

When I took a reduction in pay, I downsized my housing and cut everything else evenly. That way I didn't feel like I lost that much.

But no, the politicians want to stick it to the programs they don't prefer and either exempt or RAISE those programs they do like.

 8 replies



Wh1p1n

Score: 7

1:44 PM on April 10, 2011

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No matter how you slice it, the state needs to cut back on everything, including Medicaid. The bottom line is that if the state doesn't operate within a budget, then eventually there will have to be even more drastic cuts down the line. Many Texans have tried to warn the democrats about these dire consequences but so far these democrats either choose to ignore the message or they're just plain ignorant about what a budget is. Stop the spending! November 2012 cannot get here soon enough.

 5 replies



mcmurphy

Score: -3

1:42 PM on April 10, 2011

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Abolish Medicaid! Abolish social security! Abolish public education! Abolish trash collection! Abolish fire departments! Abolish libraries!

I do not want my tax dollars funding programs that will create any sort of social safety net. I'm sick of you whining about needing the government to spend money on your poor little needs--do it yourself! Just keep cutting our taxes and watch it trickle down, baby! I got bigger fish to fry than to spend my tax dollars on health care for the "community." It's time to "tighten our belts" and "cut off the deadwood" if you know what I mean!

 1 reply



John Gillnitz

Score: -3

1:38 PM on April 10, 2011

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Here is a plan I'm sure Republicans would love: We genetically engineer real vampires. Hear me out. The human race is at the top of the global food chain and doesn't have any natural predators to cull out the old and the sick. If we make some up in a lab they will take care of the parasitic class for us. Plus, a few days out of the year could be dedicated to vampire hunts to thin their numbers. Tell me that wouldn't be totally awesome. Wolverines!

 3 replies



jinx

Score: 2

11:20 AM on April 10, 2011

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There is no easy answer for a Medicaid cut. If you are mentally ill you have little choice as to what will happen to you. SSI gives \$500 and some odd dollars for food, shelter, etc to live on. These people are helpless. There are no more homes for them to live in as in the old days so many are living on the streets as beggars. These people can not help what has happened to them. As a Christian, I am saying we can not disown them as God loves them as much as he does us. There are many more programs that

could be cut but this one should not. Billions of dollars are given to countries that hate our guts and would cut our throats if given a chance. These are the cuts that need to be made nationally. I am sure we have other cuts at state level also.



[blacklandfarmer](#)

Score: 3

10:56 AM on April 10, 2011

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The motto of this tough budget session should be, "prove it." If it does not create wellness, or preserve life, it deserves funding cuts. Our mental health system, for example, does not cure anything. It doesn't do much for quality of life either. It's been broken for years yet we continue to fund it generously. That money could be spent on services that cure.

[2 replies](#)



[Speak_English](#)

Score: 3

10:47 AM on April 10, 2011

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We are not owed anything. Cut, cut, cut!

[5 replies](#)



[Larrywp](#)

Score: 1

10:44 AM on April 10, 2011

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Apparently, there are some people on this thread who think that doctors are the bad guys because they tend to make more money than the rest of us. Let me remind you that, after high school, a doctor has gone through four years of college - and, unlike the rest of us, they had to come through those years with a sterling record of at least a 3.8 gpa if they want to go to a good medical school in the U.S. - four years of Medical School, with the same kind of grade requirements and then, depending on the specialty, anywhere from three to seven years of Residency. All of the schooling part is without salary, so most of them have to take on enormous debt of hundreds of thousands of dollars in many cases. Then, of course, they get a salary of about thirty or forty grand a year those years of Residency. At the end of this training, they are in their mid-thirties and just starting a career. I think they deserve some extra pay, considering the service they perform for this society. If they have to assume some of the burden of this economy by taking a 10% cut in Medicare reimbursement, that is okay too. They should all get off Medicaid anyway, because that program is a sleazy son of a gun. They let people into that program who can work and pay for themselves, then they pick on doctors for minor errors and fine them tens of thousands of dollars; and, they threaten them with criminal charges for failing to put a start time on a chart if they do not pay up quickly. It is called EXTORTION, and its done in the name of Government, which is all of us, people. WE are doing this to our physicians...the ones who help us when we are sick and vulnerable. It is shameful!

[1 reply](#)



[Wh1p1n](#)


Score: 1

10:38 AM on April 10, 2011

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obama and the democrats agreed to these cuts, and I as recall, he claimed credit for wanting them all along. Hypocritical? It sure looks like it.


[3 replies](#)


Dean123 Score: 2

9:44 AM on April 10, 2011 [Report Abuse](#)

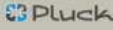
Does Walmart offer healthcare yet?

 3 replies


blueboy Score: 1

9:33 AM on April 10, 2011 [Report Abuse](#)

Why don't they cut back in the prisons? Buy them cheaper food and cut their medical benefits. I guess that would be unconstitutional.

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