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# Learn. Pray. Act. REPEAL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE VIRGINIA INTERFAITH CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY

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## Religious leaders still pursuing Medicaid expansion

By Tammie Smith

Richmond Times-Dispatch

Budgets are moral documents, faith leaders said Wednesday as they implored legislators drafting the state's two year-spending plan to change their minds and expand Medicaid.

"How is it that living in this great and blessed commonwealth of ours, Virginia, that in the midst of all of this greatness, we are giving consensus to allowing more and more of our citizens to fall into vulnerability?" said Imad Damaj, founder of the Virginia Muslim Coalition for Public Affairs.

"Isn't that immoral? Why isn't that lack of health care, lack of access to health care, immoral?" Damaj said, flanked by leaders representing the Catholic, Baptist, Jewish and other faiths and denominations.

Virginia's Republican-controlled House and Senate have rebuffed repeated attempts by Gov. Terry McAuliffe to

expand Medicaid.

An estimated 400,000 Virginians fell into an insurance coverage gap created when the state did not expand Medicaid as the Affordable Care Act intended. A 2012 ruling from the U.S. Supreme Court made Medicaid expansion optional for states.

Advocates say the lack of Medicaid expansion has left some of the most vulnerable people out of luck when it comes to health insurance coverage. They are not poor enough to qualify for Medicaid and they don't earn enough to qualify for subsidies to buy insurance on the health insurance exchanges.

"We need insurance, not more charity that creates dependency," said the Rev. Charles Swadley, who until recently served as interim chairman of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, which hosted the news briefing. The group said it has sent letters signed

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## Press Conference goes very well

On Feb. 17, the Virginia Interfaith Center and Virginia Consumer Voices for Healthcare sponsored a press conference at the General Assembly building on Capitol Square. (See the Times-Dispatch coverage by Tammie Smith at left.) The event featured a half-dozen area faith leaders who had signed a letter to the legislators asking them to close the Medicaid coverage gap. Those were only a small representation of the nearly 300 religious leaders who signed the letter. Virginia's Republican-controlled House and Senate have rebuffed repeated attempts by Gov. Terry McAuliffe to expand Medicaid. Speaker of the House William Howell instead offered additional funding to free clinics in the state. "Funding for more clinics is a woefully inadequate response to the healthcare crisis in Virginia," said Kim Bobo, new VICPP Executive Director.

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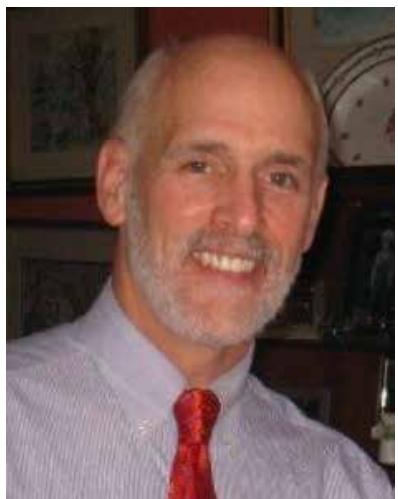
# Closing the healthcare gap

By JOHN D. COPENHAVER

Last week I joined 300 faith leaders from across Virginia, including several from the Winchester area, in signing a public letter calling upon the General Assembly to close the health-care coverage gap. The letter explains that health-care coverage is a moral imperative and fundamental human right. Specifically, 400,000 Virginians could get affordable health-care coverage if we closed the coverage gap — 5,000 hard-working

people right here in Winchester and Frederick County, and another 15,000 in Clarke, Warren, Shenandoah, Fauquier, and Loudoun counties. These members of our

community and region often forego life-preserving care and are forced to rely on hospitals and limited free clinics for health-care emergencies. Virginians in this health-care coverage gap include low-income working adults, veterans, people with disabilities, and those under 65 who are ineligible for Virginia's restrictive Medicaid program (ranking 48th in the country in per-capita Medicaid spending according to the Virginian Pilot). Speaking Wednesday in Richmond at a Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP) press conference, the Rabbi Martin Beifeld of Congregation Beth Ahabah said, "When members of society-atlarge are ill, our responsibility — not only of the medical profession but of all of us — expands to ensure that medical resources are available at an affordable cost to those who need them. This principle is embodied in the concept of tikkun olam — what we are obligated to do in order to repair the world in which we find ourselves."



VICPP Board member John Copenhaver wrote a Letter to the Editor of The Winchester Star, his local newspaper, urging Virginia to expand Medicaid coverage.

We call upon our lawmakers to access available federal funds by supporting legislation and/or budget provisions to expand coverage. We have sent a similar letter to every lawmaker in Virginia expressing our concern that they have delayed expanding coverage far too long. Denying Virginians needed health care is not only mean-spirited, it is also an unnecessary economic drain on our hospitals, communities and state government. Virginia loses more than \$4.4 million per day by not closing the health-care coverage gap.

Unfortunately, this week the Senate Finance Committee and House Appropriation Committee stripped the governor's proposed budget of the money for closing this health-care coverage gap, despite the fact that all the costs for expansion would be covered by federal tax dollars and would generate needed resources for the commonwealth, its hospitals, and its residents.

Instead, the committees are proposing modest budget increases for free clinics and community health centers, a substitute that is woefully inadequate and further burdens the state budget. Moreover, charity care is not health insurance.

At the press conference, the Rev. Charles Swadley, a retired United Methodist minister, declared, "We need insurance, not more charity that creates dependency. The dollars are there to support the coverage, but too often we play the numbers game and trade politics and human lives in some sort of strange game of ideology and political trade-offs while the poor watch the game played out at a distance, often unable to speak."

These 300 faith leaders are calling on legislators to restore funding to the budget to close the health-care coverage gap. Doing so is morally and economically right. We ask for people of good will to join us in this effort to ensure that all Virginians can get the health-care they need to remain healthy, productive members of our community.

*—The Rev. Dr. John D. Copenhaver, professor emeritus at Shenandoah University, is vice chair of the Board of Directors of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy.*



PRESS CONFERENCE:  
Dr. Eli Burke and others  
speak about Medicaid  
expansion at the General  
Assembly.

## Times-Dispatch coverage, continued

by 300 faith leaders to legislators urging them to close the coverage gap.

"The dollars are there to support the coverage, but too often we play the numbers game and trade politics and human lives in some sort of strange game of ideology and political trade-offs while the poor watch the game

played out at a distance, often unable to speak," Swadley said.

"Today as a community leader I see the health care dilemma as another way that keeps people down, depressed and in a constant state of dependency and indignity," Swadley said.

Even though House and Senate

leaders have said they will not include the governor's proposals in the budgets under consideration, those at the briefing were still hopeful.

"When we make wrong choices, the right thing to do is to turn around," said Kim Bobo, Virginia Interfaith Center executive director.



Jeff Caruso



Dr. Imad Damaj



Rabbi Martin Beifeld

# Legislative Update

## 2016 General Assembly session moves into the home stretch juggling three budgets

On Sunday, Feb. 21, the House and Senate released their versions of the 2017-2018 budget. Both budgets have significant differences to the Governor's proposed biennial budget.

Below we have outlined where bills stand and how our policies are affected by the House and Senate budgets. (For more detailed analysis of all three budgets, visit the Commonwealth Institute's side by side comparison chart.)

The last two weeks of the 2016 General Assembly session will be spent cleaning up bills that remain in committee of the opposing houses and sending bills to conference if the House and Senate versions of the same bill cannot be resolved. The same is true of the budget bill versions in the House and Senate. Having deliberated and passing their own budget versions, each house will reject the opposing house's versions on March 1.

The budget conferees have been named. In the House, they include Delegates Chris Jones (chair of the House Appropriations Committee), Steve Landes (Vice Chairman), John O'Bannon, Tag Greason, Kirk Cox and Luke Torian (new to the conference committee and the only Democrat). In the Senate, the conferees are Senators Tommy Norment and Emmett Hanger (chair and co-chair of the Senate Finance Committee) Frank Ruff, Frank Wagner, Steve Newman, Dick Saslaw and Janet Howell.

Here is an update on where our priorities stand:

### **Healthcare:**

VICPP is disappointed that neither the House or Senate accepted Federal funding to provide 400,000 Virginians access to Medicaid in their budgets. The House and Senate budgets reflect this action by removing \$3 billion in Federal funding, reversing the identified state savings and reinstating processes to

reform the current Medicaid system. The House version added language that would reinstate efforts to "reform and innovate" Medicaid using the now-defunct Medicaid Innovation and Reform Commission, which effectively stalled efforts to expand Medicaid in the latter years of the McDonnell and the first year of the McAuliffe administrations. The Senate inserted more ambiguous language that is process- but not outcomes-oriented.

### **Criminal Justice:**

The Governor's budget allows the state to invest savings from the closings of Juvenile Justice facilities into community based services. The House and Senate budgets support this measure and establish a workgroup on juvenile justice facilities. Community based services for juveniles have proven to be more effective at rehabilitating youth, and we support the Department of Juvenile Justice transformation.

### **Redistricting:**

The House Elections Subcommittee heard three Senate bills related to redistricting. SB 31, SB 59 and SB 191 would create an independent redistricting commission, criteria for more fair redistricting and a voter referendum respectively. The committee had previously tabled similar legislation from the House and moved to table all three Senate bills. To improve the redistricting process, the General Assembly must pass legislation prior to 2021.

### **Economic Justice:**

SB 23, a bill to raise the grand larceny threshold from \$200 to \$500 was tabled in the House Courts of Justice Committee this week. The Center supports raising the grand larceny threshold to \$1,500 and will continue to work with the Virginia Alliance Against Mass Incarceration on this important issue.

## Our 'news hawks' on Capitol Hill

Allie Atkeson (top), Becky Bowers-Lanier (center), and Virginia Consumer Voices' Karen Bell (bottom) have spent a lot of hours at the Capitol and the General Assembly office building since January monitoring the legislature during this session, feeding information to the rest of us about the status of the legislation that we at VICPP hold dear.



Becky and Allie have prepared weekly updates, with links to specific bills that concern the issues we're most interested in advocating for, such as juvenile justice reform or healthcare access, that we have sent on to our membership database through Action Network.



To date it's not been a very successful season for VICPP and VCV, as much of the legislation we favor has been either tabled or defeated outright. But we're keeping the faith and will continue to fight for our legislative priorities. And we thank these three women for spending much of their time hanging in there with the lawmakers, their staff members and all the other flotsam and jetsam that goes along with the G.A. We appreciate their efforts to keep the rest of us on top of what's happening.



# Board to meet March 15

The Virginia Interfaith Center's Board of Directors will meet March 15, starting with new member orientation at 10 a.m. The full board will gather at 11 a.m. and then break into committees for a working lunch, coming back together at 2:30 p.m. for a final session. It will be the first meeting for our new Executive Director Kim Bobo, who has hit the ground running — or beyond running — and has participated in multiple events and scheduled dozens of meetings.

Other dates to remember coming up:

**March 8** — planning team for Immigrant Advocacy network training

**March 12** — General Assembly 2016 session ends

**March 17** — Organizing meeting at Williamsburg Baptist Church for faith leaders

**April 16** — Kim Bobo to be honored in Washington by Labor Educators' group

**April 26** — "Healthcare Matters" Town Hall with the local branch of NAACP

**May 6-8** — VICPP and VCV will have a information table at the East End Festival at Chimborazo Park

**May 5** — VICPP day-long staff planning retreat at Richmond Hill



# Medicaid at 50

## Virginia's lawmakers continue to block coverage for many of their neighbors

**O**n its 50th anniversary, it's important to remember that the Medicaid program has helped make millions of Americans healthier by improving access to preventive and primary care and by providing care for serious diseases. Medicaid also covers most of the nursing home and other long-term care services needed by Americans.

In Virginia, about one million people have Medicaid insurance. They are primarily children, pregnant women, seniors and people with disabilities. But unlike 30 other states and D.C., Virginia legislators are continuing to block new Medicaid coverage for uninsured adults. The state has already forfeited billions of dollars (federal taxes we have already paid). This affects hundreds of thousands of low income Virginians who are mostly working in important sectors of the economy (tourism, construction, retail), but who don't have access to affordable health insurance on the job or from the federal marketplace.

Currently, Virginia parents can only get Medicaid if they are extremely poor. Medicaid eligibility for working parents cuts off at just \$12,132/

year for a family of four in Northern Virginia, \$9,324/year for a family of four in most cities, and only \$7,980/year for a family of four in most rural parts of the state. The lowest income level is only 33% of the federal poverty line! As a result, a poor parent loses Medicaid if he works more hours or takes a higher-paying job. If parents earn \$13,000, \$17,000 or \$24,000, they fall into Virginia's Health Coverage Gap and do not qualify for health insurance. It's even worse for adults who don't have minor children. If they aren't pregnant, disabled or over age 65, Virginia adults cannot get Medicaid at all – even if they have ZERO income!

But in the states that have adopted health reform's Medicaid expansion (e.g. West Virginia and Kentucky), poor adults can earn substantially more and still get Medicaid. The eligibility limit in those states is \$16,243/year for an individual or \$33,465/year for a family of four (138% of the poverty line). If income rises above this amount, the adult can get subsidized coverage through the health insurance marketplace.

Virginia must close the coverage gap to allow hundreds of thousands of Virginia's hardworking, uninsured adults to secure the health coverage they need.

—Karen Cameron

## Special guest to visit on March 8

Director Kim Bobo has invited the Rev. Phil Tom to stop by the office at 2 p.m. on March 8 while he is in Richmond. He is interim pastor at Eastchester Presbyterian Church in the Bronx, N.Y.

Rev. Tom served in the Obama Administration as Director of the Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the U.S. Department of Labor in Washington, D.C., where he assisted the Secretary and Department of Labor agencies in reaching out and building relationships/partnerships with faith-based groups. Prior to that, Tom served as Associate for Small Church and Community Ministry in the General Assembly Mission Council of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Louisville, Ky., and served urban congregations for 23 years in Chicago, St. Paul and Indianapolis.



Rev. Tom