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## New numbers call for action

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius was disingenuous the other day in suggesting there was some cause-and-effect relationship between the Legislature's failure to pass the Kansas Health Policy Authority's comprehensive reform plan in 2008 and the increased numbers of uninsured Kansans newly reported for 2006-07.

"Although the Legislature asked for the plan, got the plan, and it would've been funded with an additional stream of revenue, they decided to take it off the table from the outset," Sebelius told the Lawrence Journal-World. "So I think we are seeing some of the results."

Not exactly. Legislative inaction doesn't tend to be retroactive.

Still, Sebelius was right to find fault with the Legislature's selective attention to the KHPA's 21 reform recommendations, and to call the Census Bureau's latest total of 340,000 insured Kansans "very alarming to a lot of Kansas families" -- an increase to 12.5 percent of the population, compared with 11.3 percent a year earlier. Only nine other states saw increases in their uninsured numbers, during a period that saw the national average decrease from 15.8 to 15.3 percent.

The governor's sense that Kansans want more legislative action would seem to be supported by the newly released results of a May phone poll of 504 likely Kansas voters, conducted for the Kansas Health Care Consumer Coalition by the Ad Astra Institute of Kansas:

- 67 percent said they agreed or strongly agreed that "everyone should be provided with health insurance coverage."
- 63 percent said they would support "a tax-funded health insurance program run by a public trust fund," if it covered everyone, offered high quality care and "allowed everyone free choice among competing doctors."
- Only 23 percent said they prefer the current health insurance system over other options such as publicly funded coverage (27 percent) or affordable subsidized private insurance (26 percent).

True, the nation's health care problem isn't Kansas' to fix, and state lawmakers should be cautious of taking on more responsibility for covering the uninsured than uncertain state revenues can handle going forward. Sebelius also may need to come up with an alternative to a 50-cent hike in the cigarette tax, which she and the KHPA have been pushing to fund health reform since 2004 and 2007, respectively, with no success.

But no issue hits Kansans where they live and breathe like health care. State lawmakers need to commit now to doing all they can next year to address the cost and availability of care.

For the editorial board, Rhonda Holman

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