

# Opinion

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## Editorial



### Neal knows a crisis — health costs — when he sees it

Nueces County is doing well, according to County Judge Loyd Neal, who isn't one to sugarcoat his annual State of the County speeches. He also doesn't exaggerate. When he says something is a crisis, it's a crisis.

The only crisis Neal declared during Tuesday's state-of speech was the same one he declared two years ago — the cost of health care. The audience was not one that Neal would interrupt with old news when they could be out expanding the property tax base. The problem continues to be relevant and urgent. Plus, there's new news — a potential solution with a nifty name, The Texas Way. We'll explain it momentarily.

First we must point out what we've been pointing out for more than Neal's two years that a solution has existed under our noses all of this time. The only obstacle is partisan politics and the lingering ill effects on Texas taxpayers of former Gov. Rick Perry's presidential ambitions.

Most of Nueces County's uninsured indigents would be covered by Medicaid instead of by Nueces County taxpayers alone — if Perry had accepted the Medicaid expansion prescribed under Obamacare, and if Gov. Greg Abbott would accept it. Not only do they refuse to do it; they went to the Supreme Court at Texas taxpayer expense to win the right to refuse it. Had they not expended state resources to do that, and succeeded at the Supreme Court, the Medicaid expansion would have been mandatory.

And Nueces County taxpayers, like other Texas taxpayers in counties that have hospital districts, wouldn't have to pay the same bill twice. In Nueces County alone, taxpayers foot the bills for 8,200 uninsured poor. About 7,400 of them would be covered by the Medicaid expansion. The annual bill via the Nueces County Hospital District is about \$32 million.

Most of that bill would be absorbed via the mostly federal Medicaid funding. Taxpayers in the other 49 states, including Jerry Brown's California and Andrew Cuomo's New York, plus the District of Columbia would share the burden with Nueces County taxpayers.

That, in sum, is what our past two governors have refused for the sake of opposing President Obama. Neal, a loyal Republican, is among Republican county judges who first urged the Medicaid expansion even if it meant not opposing Obamacare. They live in a real world, not the make-believe John Ford Western that Perry seeks to inhabit.

Abbott, at least, is amenable to doing things The Texas Way. The Texas Way is a plan championed by the Texas Hospital Association because opposing Obamacare for the sake of opposing Obamacare, while gratifying for some politicians, doesn't pay Texas hospital bills. Texas hospitals also inhabit a real world.

The idea behind Texas Way is to receive the federal funding that would have come as a Medicaid expansion, but instead as a state-administered block grant. The state would use the money to help the uninsured working poor obtain private insurance. They would pay rates and co-pays at some price point that wouldn't be out of their reach. But — importantly from a philosophical viewpoint we don't oppose — they would have to pay something. They would have to take some responsibility for their health and their medical bills. They would not lose their incentive to work.

In short, The Texas Way, in addition to sounding Texan, also meets the key semantical requirement for Republican support of not being a so-called entitlement.

Plus it's a face-saving way to accept billions of federal dollars that Texans helped pay in the first place. The Texas Way would allow Texas to bite the hand of the federal government hard enough to satisfy Texas Republicans but not too hard to prevent being fed.

The Texas Way needs approval by the Legislature. The legislation hasn't been filed, and sponsors haven't stepped forward. Time is wasting. And in the meantime, Texas taxpayers are paying twice for what they should have to pay only once.