

infrastructure. Unlike Washington, Florida's constitution

Some critics say Florida is leaving billions of dollars of federal funding on the table. But those federal dollars are not federal tax revenue. Each year the federal government spends more than \$1 trillion dollars more than it has, leading to a national debt approaching \$17 trillion. Floridians' tax dollars, and many borrowed dollars, have already been spent on existing federal programs — any new Medicaid spending will be deficit spending.

Others say if Florida doesn't take this money, other states will get it. But that's not how Medicaid works. Each state will receive the federal matching funds they need — and no more — regardless of how many states expand. Florida's choice does not increase federal spending in New York or California; it just means the federal government will spend less.

And what do taxpayers get for their investment? Medicaid's clinical outcomes are very concerning. A recent landmark study in Oregon found "no significant improvements in measured physical health outcomes in the first two years" among Medicaid patients.

Florida is in the process of the most significant reforms to our Medicaid program in its 40-year history, but it will take time to improve the access, quality and cost in this massive entitlement program.

Florida should have a strong safety net for those truly in need. However, the safety net will be weakened by increasing eligibility and costs without a plan to sustainably pay for it. I cannot support a massive increase to the crippling debt we are passing on to our children.

The Florida House found that many people could be better served by not expanding. So instead of simply saying no to Medicaid expansion, the Florida House developed a plan to meet Florida's needs. Our plan relies on private coverage, not Medicaid. Private coverage provides better value for patients — better access, more choice and less stigma.

The House plan would have covered about 125,000 low-income parents and disabled adults who are not eligible for Medicaid — and would have done so within existing state resources. Unfortunately, this bill did not pass the Legislature this year.

However, about 402,000 uninsured low-income Floridians will receive federal subsidies to purchase private coverage on the federal health insurance exchange. This will only happen because we did not expand Medicaid. If we expand Medicaid, federal law cuts off eligibility for this coverage. Our actions ensured this population will be covered starting Jan. 1.

Florida isn't alone in its struggles with this difficult expansion decision. Recent reports say 21 states have rejected Medicaid expansion and six more are contemplating rejection.

Increasing our dependence on Washington is not the answer to solving our health-care challenges. The Florida House has proposed real solutions for sustainable access to quality health care in our state.

[State Rep. John Wood, R-Winter Haven, represents District 41. He serves on the House Select Committee on the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Email: john.wood@myfloridahouse.gov.]