

Legislative Backfire

Surprise, Utah was denied its Medicaid expansion waiver. South Salt Lake takes a petty approach to homelessness. Plus, the latest in the "In God We Trust" debate.

July 31, 2019

<https://www.cityweekly.net/utah/legislative-backfire/Content?oid=14049552>

By [Katharine Biele](#) @kathybiele



Legislative Backfire

What a surprise—not! The Trump administration denied the watered-down version of Medicaid expansion and now look where we are—back to the initiative that passed. Of course, the Legislature in all its "wisdom" will likely try to undo that again, but for the moment, it's a moment. Are they listening? "The 22 mostly red states that refused to accept expansion starting in 2014 caused 15,600 unnecessary deaths among their residents," the *Los Angeles Times* reports. Some Utahns have been waiting expectantly to hear from our own Trump Health and Human Services appointee Brian Shiozawa, but the once-moderate former legislator has been silent. Medicaid expansion was among 155 ballot measures in 37 states in 2018, continuing to terrify the National Conference of State Legislatures, which wants initiatives and thus democracy severely limited. NCSL says it's been co-opted by special interests. Those interests in Utah are the interests of the people, and the Legislature has been ignoring them.

Not in South Salt Lake



South Salt Lake is showing just how petty and parochial a city can be. Let's talk homelessness and how everyone wants someone to handle it, but that someone isn't them. South Salt Lake doesn't like that it's slated to take a 300-bed shelter, one of three to take the place of Salt Lake City's Road Home, according to a *Deseret News* story. Sure, it would have been nice if the shelter had been smaller, but there are two others slated for Salt Lake City. The blowback was inevitable—not in my backyard. "Common arguments are that there will be increases in crime, litter, thefts, violence and that property taxes will decrease. The benefits for the residents of the development are often ignored," a Homeless Hub report said of a similar case. It's all about fear of the evil specter of drug-addicted homeless people. Now, the state is ready to take over the project because of SoSL's reluctance to move forward. Homelessness is not an easy issue to solve, but looking at solutions instead of problems would be a good start.



In Whom Do We Trust?

The story was about how South Dakota is mandating that every public school display these words prominently: "In God We Trust." And the question is: Do we, really? *The Salt Lake Tribune* points out that Utah schools have posted that phrase for 17 years, even after a weak-kneed protest by the ACLU of Utah. Not to be pedantic, but there is an ongoing dispute over whether the country was actually founded around Christian principles. Let's just say no, it wasn't Christianity. God, however, does come into the conversation as it was inserted in the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954 and reaffirmed by SCOTUS in 2004. It also happens to be in the Declaration of Independence, though kind of distantly. Funny thing, though, that the *Smithsonian* magazine noted: The man who wrote and intentionally left God out of the Pledge was an ordained Baptist minister. We should wonder why.