

VIEWPOINT

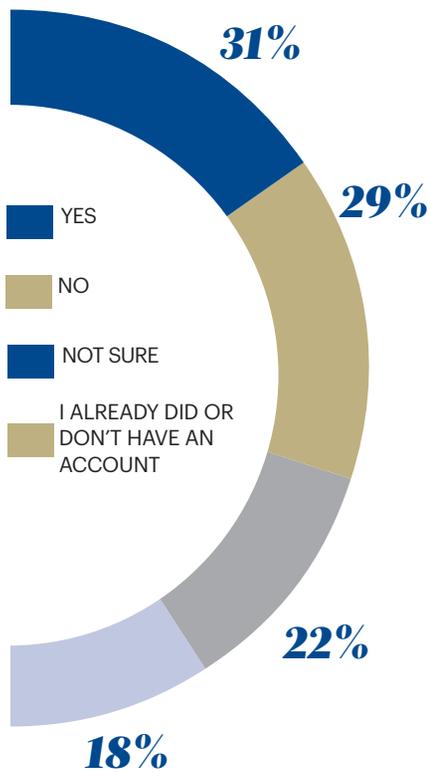
Triad Business Journal welcomes letters to the editor

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► BUSINESS PULSE SURVEY

WE ASKED

Are you thinking about deleting your Facebook account after the latest data scandal?



NEXT WEEK'S QUESTION

Should you have to be at least 21 to buy a gun in North Carolina?

GUEST COLUMN

Medicaid expansion: It's still not too late for North Carolina

It's been five years since the N.C. General Assembly rejected Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare. It was a bizarre and self-destructive decision. Expansion would have covered hundreds of thousands of North Carolinians. Preventable deaths would have declined. The federal government would have covered 100 percent of added coverage costs for the first few years and never covered less than 90 percent. Money would have flowed into the state, creating tens of thousands of much-needed jobs.

According to research by the Rand Corp., expansion would have cut the state's health costs, because the small increase in administrative and coverage expenses would have been more than offset by reductions in payments to hospitals for covering the uninsured.

Moreover, rejecting Medicaid expansion meant that by paying federal taxes, North Carolinians have been subsidizing health coverage for people in other states while getting nothing in return.

One rarely sees such an unambiguously good opportunity as Medicaid expansion, and yet North Carolina said no. There was no mystery why. The decision was driven by Republican animus toward President Obama and the program nicknamed for him.

Republicans said they couldn't trust the federal government's fiscal promises, but that was a bogus excuse on many levels. For one thing, the Supreme Court said Medicaid expansion was voluntary,



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which meant that we could always back out if promises weren't kept.

And about the same time in early 2013, the NCGA approved a highway bill that also featured a federal promise of funding. Apparently that fiscal promise was believable. It was fortunate that the highway program wasn't nicknamed "Obamaways," or else the NCGA would have rejected it as well.

So now five years have passed since the rejection, and we now have information about what's happened in states that expanded Medicaid. Have things mostly worked out as well as analysts predicted?

In a word, yes.

According to a recent article by the Brookings Institution, "the strong balance of objective evidence indicates that actual costs to states so far from expanding Medicaid are negligible or minor, and that states across the political spectrum

do not regret their decisions to expand Medicaid."

Many expansion states have enrolled more Medicaid recipients than they expected, but federal funding – as promised – has kept that from increasing costs. An article in the journal *Health Affairs* found that budget officers in expansion states reported "no significant increases in spending from state funds as a result of the expansion."

A review of academic research by the Kaiser Foundation shows that most studies find that in expansion states, uninsured rates have dropped, hospitals' costs of caring for the uninsured have fallen, patients' access to care has improved and financial security among lower-income families has increased.

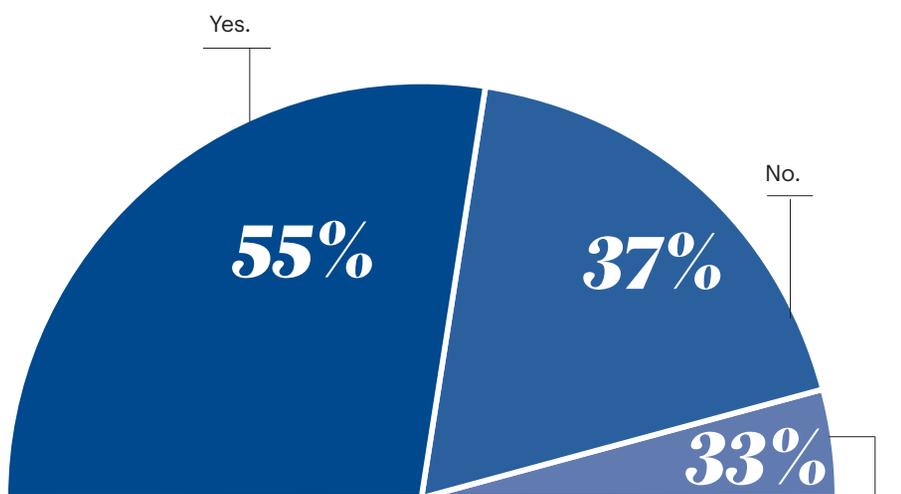
Given that North Carolina faces many health problems, such as one of the highest infant-mortality rates in the country, you'd think we'd jump at the chance for better access to health care for little or no expense to taxpayers. And we still can.

It's not too late for North Carolina to expand Medicaid (which it should do without a work requirement). The federal government's promise to cover 100 percent of states' costs has expired, but it will still cover 90 percent in perpetuity. If we sign up, lives could be saved, financial stress could be reduced and the state's health costs could be cut.

Our representatives in Raleigh made a boneheaded decision five years ago. They can partially undo that error by finally expanding Medicaid.

► SURVEY SAYS

WAS THE STRENGTH OF THE ACC OVERESTIMATED IN NCAA MEN'S BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT?



Time will tell. Let's see who advances from here.

Should Triad companies include more women on their boards of directors?

