



May 20, 2013
Statement of Rich Livingston, AARP State President

Good Morning. I'm Rich Livingston, AARP State President. It is a pleasure to be with you this morning.

The time for a decision is fast approaching.

The Maine legislature will be deciding whether Maine should accept millions of dollars of federal aid under the Affordable Care Act to offer health insurance to 69,500 uninsured Mainers.

Our policy makers should make it a priority to put politics aside and do the right thing: Expand access to health care.

It is important to emphasize that these are federal dollars already set aside for the state of Maine to expand health care and if we are not ready to accept those funds in 2014 - they go away. The opportunity to act is now.

Through this measure, 69,500 Maine people who are not currently insured could qualify for health care coverage, including more than 16,300 Mainers ages 50-64 who have lost their jobs or are working in jobs without health benefits.

Unexpectedly losing a job is tough at the best of times, but studies show that it takes longer for older workers to re-enter the job force compared to their younger counterparts.

Once they lose their jobs, older workers face unemployment lasting, on average, more than a year.

That's a whole year of mounting debt and health concerns that many will leave untreated because they cannot afford to go to their own doctor.

Leaving people uninsured without access to primary and preventive care can put at risk even the most thoughtful preparation for health and financial security in later life.

By accepting federal funds to expand access to health care, Maine can make sure that thousands of people have access to both primary and preventive care such as medical screenings and treatment for chronic diseases like cancer and heart disease.

This means that 69,500 will have access to the care they need that will keep them from getting sick in the first place.

With access to affordable coverage, residents will be less likely to seek care in an emergency room, which, in most cases, is the most expensive way to receive health care.

Accepting federal funds to expand health care coverage makes sense regarding the hospital settlement issue.

Expanding Medicaid is good for the long-term sustainability of Maine's hospitals. Through this measure, the need for charity care will go down. If Maine does not accept these federal dollars, our hospitals will continue to lose money.

Our state has a tremendous opportunity to help thousands of people in a very real and personal way, and to help our overall economy. We shouldn't miss it.