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THE TIMES-DISPATCH PIGSKIN PAYOFF CONTEST ROLL OVER

Today's top opinion: Medicaid — McAuliffe's turn

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Posted: Tuesday, September 2, 2014 10:30 pm



BOB BROWN/TIMES-DISPATCH

Gov. Terry McAuliffe

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In a lectern-thumping stemwinder explaining his budget amendments back in June, Gov. Terry McAuliffe said he was ordering his staff to have a Medicaid expansion plan on his desk by September.

Well, September is here. Presumably, the Medicaid plan is as well. What's in it?

The answer should be interesting. McAuliffe made it plain that he was not going to wait any longer for the GOP-controlled legislature to come up with a plan to do something it clearly doesn't want to do. He was going to find a way to expand Medicaid unilaterally.

That raised an obvious question: If McAuliffe thought he could expand Medicaid without the General Assembly's help, then why did he drag the state to the brink of a state government shutdown? McAuliffe swore he wouldn't sign a budget that did not include Medicaid expansion,

and he stuck to that position as long as he possibly could. Only at the last minute did he

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fold his hand and break that vow.

Lawmakers will return to Richmond later this month to debate Medicaid again. Presumably, McAuliffe might wait until they do so before showing his own cards — though it would hardly seem to make much difference. The GOP now has a firmer grip on the Assembly than it did a few months ago, and does not seem any more inclined to expand the program now than it was then.

Which is a pity, because a fiscally conservative means to do so has been available for months: the Marketplace Virginia plan proposed by several Republican state senators. That plan would use federal expansion money to purchase vouchers for private insurance, much as the Ryan plan for Medicare reform would have done.

We liked the proposal when it was first floated, and still see it as the most sensible way to split otherwise intractable differences. Unfortunately, it seems destined for oblivion — along with any plan the governor's administration comes up with, if it ever does.

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