

Evers says Medicaid expansion would help fight racial disparities

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Declaring racism a public health crisis, Gov. Tony Evers renewed his call to accept federal money to expand the Medicaid program, arguing it would help address racial disparities in Wisconsin.

In a call with reporters Thursday, the gov noted racial disparities that span infant mortality to incarceration, unemployment and poverty.

He called the statistics “sobering and devastating.”

“Wisconsin continuously ranks among the worst in the nation in disparate outcomes for marginalized populations,” Evers said.

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The gov ran on expanding the program and included a provision in his budget proposal to accept the federal money only to see GOP lawmakers remove the item.

His renewed call to accept the money comes against the backdrop of protests over the death of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer.

Evers said in the 2020 federal fiscal year, Wisconsinites will pay over \$1 billion in federal income taxes to support Medicaid expansion in other states, but will not receive a return from that spending.

Residents “will pay that amount regardless if we expand Medicaid coverage,” he said.

“We have an opportunity now to fix some wrongs that have been long-standing for decades,” Evers said. “The people of Wisconsin have a great interest in having us

do that. We have a bill out there right now that will deal with one small issue, but an important issue about use of force, but let's get together and see if we can accomplish something."

The offices of Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, and Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, didn't return a message Thursday seeking comment. The GOP leaders have consistently rejected Evers' call to expand Medicaid, saying it amounted to an expansion of welfare. They also have argued the state should instead focus on helping those who are uninsured to obtain coverage through the federal health care exchanges under the Affordable Care Act.

Evers also continued to stress his support for those peacefully expressing their First Amendment rights in protesting George Floyd's death.

But he argued those who are looting and resorting to violent tactics are damaging the First Amendment.

"First Amendment rights are not to be trampled in this state or any other state," the gov said. "For those who decide to do damage, they are damaging the First Amendment and they are damaging the opportunity for thousands of people across Wisconsin to exercise their First Amendment right."

Evers also defended his decision to call up the National Guard during the protests. He said the state provided support to local governments by stationing the Wisconsin National Guard to protect properties such as state office buildings, the Capitol, utilities and cultural places.

"The Guard I think has done exactly what we asked them to do," Evers said.

Evers said while there are those who act in "unlawful ways," the vast majority are protesting peacefully.

"In fact, we encourage them to get out and let people know how they think about this issue," he said.