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PRESS RELEASE

Montana's Medicaid Expansion Program in Peril

Republican Senators Hold Bill Hostage to Benefit NorthWestern Energy

Helena, Mont. -- On Thursday, April 11, 2019, the Montana Senate failed to pass a bill to expand Medicaid, HB 658. Medicaid covers healthcare costs for nearly 10% of Montanans, over 96,000 people across the state. Lawmakers have [publicly intimated](#) that they are using the health care legislation as leverage to negotiate for the Montana Energy Security Act, SB 331, a bill that would allow NorthWestern to pass up to \$75 million in Colstrip-related costs to ratepayers for ten years without Public Service Commission oversight. SB 331 also allows NorthWestern to purchase an additional 150 megawatt share of the Colstrip power plant for only \$1.

“It is heartbreaking to know that some of our legislators are putting special interest and partisan politics before the lives of 1 in 10 Montanans,” said **Marci McLean-Pollock, Executive Director of Western Native Voice**. “It is shameful that these Senators are reinforcing the belief that the lives of working Montanans can be used as political pawns and that they are putting corporate profits before the lives of their constituents.”

McLean-Pollock added, “Over 15,000 urban and rural Native Americans could lose critical preventative care if House Bill 658 does not pass. Additionally, health disparities for Montana’s Native Americans will worsen, once again, putting people’s lives in direct danger as health priorities shift back to only life and limb.”

“As if fleecing captive ratepayers wasn't bad enough, now these guys want to hold Montana's most vulnerable families captive to their corporate welfare scheme," said **Beth Kaeding, a member of Northern Plains Resource Council** who testified in opposition to SB 331 earlier this week. "This small band of legislators are holding healthcare hostage for 90,000 Montanans unless their demands are met to funnel 75 million dollars to NorthWestern Energy, an out-of-state monopoly utility. It's a naked display of corruption reminiscent of the days when the Copper Kings ruled the state.”

The Montana Legislature expanded Medicaid coverage through the passage of the HELP Act in 2015. As a result, 15,495 eligible Native Americans have been able to access a comprehensive range of health care services at locations across the state. Expanded Medicaid increased access to preventative care, mental healthcare, and substance abuse treatment, helping rural communities to address the addiction epidemic. Medicaid expansion has also reduced the costs of uncompensated care absorbed by rural hospitals, allowing more rural care centers to keep their doors open. The Act has a sunset date of June 2019.

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Western Native Voice is a non-profit, non-partisan social justice organization working to inspire Native leadership through community organizing, education, leadership, and advocacy. With 7% of Montana's population being Native American living almost evenly split between reservation and urban areas, WNV organizes in both rural and urban communities using a culturally tailored community organizing and citizen education model to build Native leadership.

Northern Plains Resource Council is a grassroots conservation and family agriculture group that organizes Montanans to protect our water quality, family farms and ranches, and unique quality of life.

The Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC) is a network of grassroots organizations that span seven of the Western states with more than 15,000 members. Many WORC members live on lands overlying and neighboring federal, tribal, state and privately owned oil and gas deposits, and experience numerous impacts due to federal oil and gas production. Headquartered in Billings, Montana, WORC also has offices in Colorado and Washington, D.C.