

get shortfall next year, the state is looking at how to dump some poor people off Medicaid, whose budget line has reached \$7 billion a year, the second-highest item after public schools. As the economy has tanked, *one in every seven Michiganders now gets Medicaid*—the program set up in the 1960s as a medical-care safety net. Cutting it will mean cutting lives. Already last year in Michigan, Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D) eliminated dental and other services for adults on Medicaid, and she does not plan to restore them.

In Georgia, hundreds of nursing home residents were in line to have their Medicaid benefits cut off on July 1. The Georgia Department of Community Health, under orders from Gov. Sonny Perdue (R) to make cuts, is eliminating a program called Nursing Home Medically Needy Medicaid. This program helped people whose income exceeds \$1,692 a month, but who are unable to afford the \$3,500-4,000 a month needed for a typical nursing home. Hundreds now have nowhere to go. The state has readied termination letters.

Mississippi Legislator Speaks Out

Rep. Credell Calhoun (D-District 68) represents Hinds County, Mississippi. He was interviewed in Washington on July 15 by Marcia Merry Baker.

EIR: You have an emergency situation for Medicaid, with the Governor just writing off 6,000 people?

Calhoun: What we are really concerned about in Mississippi is the Medicaid; we have cut 65,000 people off of Medicaid, to transfer them to Medicare. It's going to take effect on Sept. 15. At that point there will be from 5-6,000 that will not be eligible for Medicare, so they will be dropped from the roll, period. That's going to be a disaster for the State of Mississippi; and of course, there are lots of people in that 65,000 that won't get adequate medical care because of that.

I don't know if Haley Barbour will call a special session to help alleviate some of the problem. He's saying he's going to get some waivers from the national Medicaid Agency to continue service to them, but up to this point, they have not got a waiver. We don't expect it to come through, so we're going to have a very bad disaster. There is a petition to recall the governor, floating right now.

EIR: When did that come about?

Calhoun: Right after the Medicaid fiasco, they started a petition. Now we don't have such a constitutional provision to recall a governor; but if enough signatures get on there, I think that's going to take him out of really any power, anyway. So he might as well come out, if they get—say—200,000 signatures, it's going to be tough for him to do anything in the legislature, come next session. So he'll be really ineffective as a Governor for the next three years, if that comes about.



Rep. Credell Calhoun, Democrat of Mississippi: On Sept. 15, the state is cutting 65,000 people off Medicaid.

EIR: And the other thing is, the shrinking healthcare delivery system. You know how Lyndon LaRouche is making an issue of the physical delivery system for care. Even if everybody had money, the system itself has been taken down a lot in recent decades: Where can you get treatment? It was built up by Hill-Burton after the Second World War, up through the 1960s and mid-'70s. But now, many counties have lost their licensed beds, or their hospital, or wards have been shut. In Mississippi, you've seen that too?

Calhoun: Oh yes. We've had many beds taken away. They were supposed to—when they took the beds away, the charity hospitals; we have several of them, and they closed them—but Medicaid was supposed to come in and take that problem away, and now they're taking the Medicaid away, so it's really going to be—See, evidently, they forgot, or somebody forgot that the charity hospitals were closed, and that Medicaid was supposed to take care of that. Now here we are, in a situation where we're going to have no Medicare for at least 5-6,000 of our people who desperately need it. It's going to be very tough.

If we can get to the next session, which is in six months, I think that we, as a legislature, will take care of the problem, but some of them are going to die before then, if we don't do something. So I don't know what Haley Barbour is going to do. He may call a special session and let us deal with it before.

See the Senate, for some reason, capitulated and just did everything that the Governor wanted, and it made it hard on the House to try to keep things in any kind of sequential order to make sure that people were taken care of. Because if the Senate doesn't cooperate with you, and the Governor is working with the Senate, it makes our job much more difficult, to try to—

We had a very good Speaker in McCoy; only he got sick and almost died from all the pressure, with tort reform and all of those things. He's trying to stand tall for the people. And here you have a Senate that's going along with the Governor, and the Governor is Big Business all the way, and doesn't care about the little people, the indigent, and the people who really can't do for themselves.

EIR: And then other aspects of your facilities; there's been also a national order that many Veterans hospitals are to be shut down. Do Mississippi people already have to go up to Little Rock, or do you have a functioning state Veterans Hospital network open still?

Calhoun: Up to this point, the Veterans Hospitals are still in operation in Mississippi. Hopefully that will continue. So far, they are still open. We have several, but we have a big one there in Jackson, and then we have some Veterans homes, taking care of our elderly.

EIR: Residential?

Calhoun: Yes, and they are doing fine, so far. Hopefully we won't get the cuts. I've been hearing about the cuts for the Veterans Hospitals. So far, they haven't hit Mississippi yet.

Hospitals Gone in Alabama and Arkansas

Ms. Johnnie Pugh, City Director, Ward 1, Little Rock, Arkansas; and Thomas E. Jackson, Member of the House of Representatives (D-District 68), Alabama, were interviewed on July 15 by Marcia Merry Baker in Washington.

EIR: Johnnie, let's start in Little Rock, where you've had a nursing career; you worked in a Veterans Hospital for seven years, and other facilities. So, you have seen up close how the hospital system, once built to serve all, is now being taken down. Little Rock is a hospital center, but you say, there are facilities with empty wards—no staff or beds?

Pugh: Well, I know St. Vincent's has wards—I have been through at least two wards—that had no beds and no people in them. The hospital has the rooms; there is no problem with the rooms; but the beds are just closed down.

There is really a nursing shortage, because since they have started working 10 and 12 hours, a lot of the people just don't want to do that. And they are so short, and they give them so many patients, so that a lot of nurses have gone to other professions because of it being too hard. So they just don't want to do it, because a lot of people—you know, you think about it, you do something that would take somebody's life, or something like that; that's something that you've got to live with.

EIR: So, short-staffing is one of the immediate problems.

Pugh: My granddaughter, an LPN, was working at Baptist Medical Center; and she quit because she was afraid of losing her license because she would be so tired that she felt she could not do it, and she didn't want to give the wrong medication.

She worked on one ward, and in the next ward over, if the nurse called in sick, she had to take her own ward *and* that ward. And she said that it was hard to just do her own ward,



Rep. Johnnie Pugh, Democrat of Arkansas, says the state has a serious shortage of nurses, leaving some wards empty.

so she was not going to take a chance on doing her ward, and the other ward too, because she was afraid of what was going to happen. Because she knew how tired she was, and at a certain period of time she just felt like she wasn't even thinking well. So she quit the job for that reason.

EIR: Has it come to pass anytime during flu season, or some other emergency, where they needed more beds, but didn't have them all?

Pugh: Not that I've heard. You know, we do have the University of Arkansas Medical Center; plus, then, we have Children's Hospital, and in the Children's Hospital we have a lot of people.

EIR: In Alabama, Representative Jackson, you have spoken out for some time about the distances people now have to go to try to get care. It's getting worse?

Jackson: [For some treatments] you have to go 60 miles away from the communities. . . .

EIR: Just for regular care, for having a baby, or falling off a truck, or something?

Jackson: They have closed obstetrics in some hospitals in communities, and you can't even go in for ob-gyn. You have to go to another community, and that's probably 40 miles away.

We're in a very dire situation when it comes to healthcare in my state, which is Alabama. And I think the nation is in pursuit. It's terrible.

Pugh: Well, we're worse than that. In West Helena, it's over 100 miles from Little Rock; and they have vans to bring people back and forth to Little Rock, to get the care of nurses, and what not. And when you leave there, between Little Rock, it's where the hospitals are, to Memphis.

Down in in Marianna and all that, Helena—this area is called the Delta. And the Delta area is poor. And those people have to go a long ways to get to a doctor and to a hospital.

EIR: In that particular place, Helena, or a similar town, do