

County advisory vote set

By Chris Welch, Union staff writer | Posted: Tuesday, August 12, 2014 9:27 am

JEFFERSON — The Jefferson County Board of Supervisors on Monday approved placing an advisory referendum on the Nov. 4 ballot asking county voters if the State of Wisconsin should accept federal Medicaid funds as part of the federal Affordable Care Act.

While the board usually meets in regular session on Tuesdays, it had moved its monthly meeting to Monday due to today's primary election.

The board, after a brief debate, voted 24-4 to place an explanatory note and the specific referendum question on the ballot.

The dissenting votes were from Supervisors James Braughler, Al Counsell, Dwayne Morris and George Jaeckel. Two supervisors, Blane Poulson and Kate Vance, were unable to attend Monday's meeting.

The resolution initially was presented to the board in June by Supervisor Kirk Lund. However, it was sent to the Administration and Rules Committee for review and a modified version passed the board Monday.

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker declined acceptance of federal funding to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), often called "Obamacare." The ACA allows states' to expand their Medicaid programs to cover people earning up to 133 percent of the poverty level. Walker chose an alternative route to expand Medicaid, expanding it for residents only earning 100 percent of the poverty level.

According to the resolution approved Monday, the federal funds, which would be administered through BadgerCare, would bring an estimated \$30.3 million into the Jefferson County economy by 2021 and would help an estimated 1,052 parents and childless adults in the county. Overall, it would help 84,000 residents statewide, according to the resolution's citation of a Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau estimate.

Jefferson County had, in 2013, more than \$7 million in expenditures for individuals with mental illness that would be covered by the federal funds.

Were the federal funds accepted, the federal government would pay 100-percent of the cost with new BadgerCare enrollees for the first three years and after that, at least 90 percent of the costs. That amounts to 90 cents on the dollar; it is currently 60 cents.

As stated in the resolution, uninsured and/or under-insured residents have a great impact in the county's Human Services Department because those residents can develop untreated ailments ranging from mental health issues and addiction issues to loss of preventative healthcare, thus likely resulting in further physical and economic losses due to "a loss of self-sufficiency."

Additionally, the resolution states that by accepting the federal funds, it would reduce the need for the county-subsidized Rock River Free Clinic.

Preceding the question on the ballot will be the explanatory note, which will read: "The Jefferson County Board of

Supervisors desires advisory public input on the question of whether or not the State of Wisconsin should accept available federal Medicaid funds to provide access to BadgerCare to residents up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level. The result of this vote is advisory, not binding. A 'yes' vote means that you want Jefferson County to encourage the State of Wisconsin to accept available Medicaid funds. A 'no' vote means that you do not want Jefferson County to encourage the State of Wisconsin to accept available federal Medicaid funds."

The referendum question will read: "Shall the State of Wisconsin accept available federal Medicaid funds to provide access to BadgerCare to Wisconsin residents up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level?"

Prior to the vote, Lund proposed an amendment to change the referendum question to read "Shall the State of Wisconsin accept available federal Medicaid funds to provide access to BadgerCare to an additional 84,000 Wisconsin residents?"

His amendment failed on a 9-19 vote. As supervisor Jim Mode observed, the 84,000 figure was an estimate, whereas the 133-percent figure was fact based on federal policy.

The board then voted on the resolution as presented Monday, which passed on the 24-4 vote.

Lund commented after the vote Monday.

"I thank the board for passing this resolution," he said. "They had gone on the record last year, before I was on the board, in favor of accepting the expanded Medicaid money. This just took it a step further, since it has not been accepted yet, to ask the voters to weigh-in and hopefully put more pressure on the state to accept this money. I hope the voters in Jefferson County vote to accept the money.

"It really makes sense to accept it because, as noted in our discussion, it costs more to not accept it while covering fewer people; it's become a partisan issue around the ACA, but I hope people can separate that and just say that right now, there are people who are being hurt by not accepting this money. It is costing the taxpayers more to not get those dollars they sent to Washington back. I hope the voters weigh in and accept this money."

To be clear, the referendum is advisory, and while it does add pressure to the state government should it pass in November, it does not mandate that the state will, in fact, accept those funds.

A copy of the resolution authorizing the advisory referendum will be sent the county's legislators, Gov. Walker's office, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services and the Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA). The WCA supports accepting the federal funds, and 19 other counties have passed resolutions in support of it as well.

Three people spoke in favor of the resolution during the public comment period of the meeting prior to the board's vote.