

CHRISTOPHER NEWPORT UNIVERSITY'S  
 JUDY FORD WASON  
 CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY

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## **Virginia voters support Medicaid expansion but worry about the feds paying their share, and doubt Special Session will accomplish anything**

### Summary of Key Findings

1. A solid majority of voters (61%) support the general idea of Medicaid expansion.
2. Voters are evenly split about whether to trust the federal government to pay its share of the expansion (48% worried, 45% not worried).
3. 49% support Del. Tom Rust's proposal to use Medicaid funds to pay private health insurance premiums for low-income workers.
4. Voters are largely pessimistic that anything will get accomplished in the Sept. 18 special session on Medicaid.
5. 58% of voters support Gov. McAuliffe's limited plan to cover the severely mentally ill and children of low-income state employees.

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## Analysis

**The State of Things:** Virginia voters are far more optimistic about the direction of their local community than they are about the direction of the Commonwealth, with 59% saying things in the community where they live are headed in the right direction, and 30% saying they are mostly going in the wrong direction. A smaller 41% say Virginia is headed in the right direction, with 39% saying it is headed in the wrong direction. Views on the direction of the state have gotten worse since early February.

<b>Overall, would you say things in the Commonwealth of Virginia are heading more in the _____ direction?</b>		Current	Sept. 10	April 24	Feb 3
	Right	41	42	42	50
	Mixed (vol)	15	13	11	11
	Wrong	39	38	44	34
	Dk/ref (vol)	5	7	2	5

<b>Would you say things where you live are heading more in the _____ direction?</b>		Current
	Right	59
	Mixed (vol)	9
	Wrong	30
	Dk/ref (vol)	2

**Views on Special Session:** Three out of four Virginia voters are paying a lot or some attention to the continued debate over Medicaid expansion in Virginia, while one in four say they are not paying attention to it. Voters are mostly pessimistic (54%) that Republicans and Democrats will come to some agreement during the special session on Medicaid, due to start on September 18. Another 30% are not sure whether to be pessimistic or optimistic, and only 15% say they are optimistic.

“The bar is pretty low,” said Dr. Quentin Kidd, director of the Wason Center for Public Policy. “The General Assembly could come out of this special session having accomplished nothing on Medicaid, and they wouldn’t defy the expectations of many voters.”

<b>How much would you say you are paying attention to the debate over Medicaid expansion?</b>	A lot	28
	Some	46
	None	25
	Dk/ref (vol)	1

<b>Are you optimistic that Republicans and Democrats can come to some agreement during this special session, pessimistic, or are you not sure either way?</b>	Optimistic	15
	Not sure	30
	Pessimistic	54
	Dk/ref (vol)	1

**Views on Medicaid Options:** While Republicans won the political debate over Medicaid expansion during the regular General Assembly session, Virginia voters continue to be of two minds on the issue. The general idea of Medicaid expansion enjoys strong support among Virginia voters, even as the worry about paying for it persists. Just over six in ten voters (61%) say they generally support the idea of expanding Medicaid to cover an additional 400,000 mostly working poor Virginians, while 31% oppose the idea. However, nearly half (48%) say they share opponents’ (mostly Republicans’) concerns that the federal government will not pay its part if Virginia expands Medicaid. Similar (although not exactly the same) questions were asked of Virginia voters in early February, and views were similar then, with 56% saying they generally supported the idea of Medicaid expansion, and 54% saying they would oppose it if the federal government did not pay its share.

“Virginia voters continue to be pulled in two directions,” said Kidd. “Most support the general idea of Medicaid expansion, but many are worried by concerns expressed by opponents as well.”

Voters are more supportive (49%) than opposed (39%) to the proposal from Del. Tom Rust, R-Herndon, to recover Affordable Care Act taxes Virginians are already paying, and using the money to pay for private insurance coverage for low-income Virginians not currently covered by Medicaid. Voters are also supportive of the elements of Governor Terry McAuliffe’s “A Healthy Virginia” that provide health coverage for an additional 25,000 people in Virginia with severe mental illness and children of low-income state employees.

<b>Proponents of Medicaid say that it will provide health coverage for an additional 400,000 mostly working poor Virginians who are uninsured. In general do you support Medicaid expansion or oppose it?</b>	Support	61
	Not sure (vol)	7
	Oppose	31
	Dk/ref (vol)	1

Feb. 3*	
Support	56
Oppose	38
Dk/ref (vol)	6

\* Question from Feb. 3 study: “Medicaid is a health care program for families and individuals with low income that is funded by both federal and state tax dollars. Currently, Virginia is faced with a decision about whether to expand the Medicaid program to cover an additional 400,000 mostly working poor Virginians who are uninsured. In general, do you support Medicaid expansion or oppose it?”

<b>Some people worry that the federal government will not pay its part if Virginia expands Medicaid. Do you share that worry?</b>	Yes	48
	Not sure (vol)	5
	No	45
	Dk/ref (vol)	2

Feb. 3*	
Support	41
Oppose	54
Dk/ref (vol)	5

\* Question from Feb. 3 study: “Some people worry that the federal government will not pay its share if Virginia expands Medicaid. Would you support Medicaid expansion even if the federal government did not pay its share and Virginia had to cover that cost, or would you oppose it?”

<b>Rather than expand Medicaid itself, one proposal in the Special Session would use federal Medicaid funds to pay low-income workers' share of the cost of health insurance benefits offered by their employers, or to pay their premiums for private insurance. Do you support such a plan or oppose it?</b>	Support	49
	Not sure (vol)	7
	Oppose	39
	Dk/ref (vol)	5

<b>Recently, Governor Terry McAuliffe announced a plan that does not require General Assembly approval to provide health coverage for an additional 25,000 people with severe mental illness and children of low-income state employees. Do you support these actions or oppose them?</b>	Support	58
	Not sure (vol)	7
	Oppose	33
	Dk/ref (vol)	2

## Full Toplines

Q1: Overall, would you say things in the COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA are heading more in the right direction or the wrong direction?

Right	41
Mixed (vol)	15
Wrong	39
Dk/ref (vol)	5

Q2: And how about in your local community, would you say things WHERE YOU LIVE are heading more in the right direction or the wrong direction?

Right	59
Mixed (vol)	9
Wrong	30
Dk/ref (vol)	2

Q3: I'd like to ask you about Medicaid, which is a health care program for families and individuals with low income that is funded by both federal and state tax dollars. There has been a debate in Virginia about whether or not to expand Medicaid to cover more people. How much would you say you have paid attention to the debate over Medicaid expansion?

A lot	28
Some	46
None	25
Dk/ref (vol)	1

Q4: The General Assembly is set to hold a Special Session starting September 18 to focus on the issue of Medicaid, and whether or not to expand it. Are you optimistic that Republicans and Democrats can come to some agreement during this special session, pessimistic, or are you not sure either way?

Optimistic	15
Not sure	30
Pessimistic	54
Dk/ref (vol)	1

Q5: Proponents of expanding Medicaid say that it will provide health coverage for an additional 400,000 mostly working poor Virginians who are uninsured. In general, do you support Medicaid expansion or oppose it?

Support	61
Not sure (vol)	7
Oppose	31
Dk/ref (vol)	1

Q6: Rather than expand Medicaid itself, one proposal in the Special Session would use federal Medicaid funds to pay low-income workers' share of the cost of health insurance benefits offered by their employers, or to pay their premiums for private insurance. Do you support such a plan or oppose it?

Support	49
Not sure (vol)	7
Oppose	39
Dk/ref (vol)	5

Q7: Some people worry that the federal government will not pay its part if Virginia expands Medicaid. Do you share that worry?

Yes	48
Not sure (vol)	5
No	45
Dk/ref (vol)	2

Q8: Recently, Governor Terry McAuliffe announced a plan that does not require General Assembly approval to provide health coverage for an additional 25,000 people with severe mental illness and children of low-income state employees. Do you support these actions or oppose them?

Support	58
Not sure (vol)	7
Oppose	33
Dk/ref (vol)	2

**Q9-13 held for future release**

**Demographics (weighted)**

EDUC: What is the last grade of school or college you had the opportunity to complete?

High school or less	18
Some college	27
Vocational or technical training	2
College graduate	33
Graduate study or more	20

HISPANIC: Do you consider yourself to be Hispanic or Latino?

Yes	2
No	98

RACE: Do you consider yourself to be:

White	73
Black or African American	19
All other	8

AGE: (Recorded as exact year of birth)

18-24	13
25-34	17
35-44	18
45-54	19
55 & older	34

REGION:

Northern Virginia	32
Richmond/Central	22
Hampton Roads	24
South/Southwest	22

RELIG: What is your religious preference, are you Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, another religion, or no religion?

Protestant	37
Christian (non-specific) (vol)	16
Catholic	13
Jewish	1
Other	17
None	14
Dk/ref (vol)	2

PARTYID: In politics today, do you generally consider yourself to be a Democrat, Republican, or Independent?

Democrat	33
Republican	31
Independent	31
Other party (vol)	1
Dk/ref (vol)	4

SEX: [INTERVIEWER CODE]

Male	45
Female	55

INCOME: And, just for statistical purposes, in which of the following categories does your family income fall?

Under \$25,000	10
\$25-\$39,999	9
\$40-\$49,999	9
\$50-\$74,999	14
\$75-\$99,999	12
\$100,000-\$124,999	13
\$125,000-\$149,999	8
Over \$150,000	12
Dk/ref (vol)	15

**How the survey was conducted:**

The results of this poll are based on 796 interviews of registered Virginia voters, including 403 on landline and 394 on cell phones, conducted Sept. 9-15, 2014. Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding. The margin of error for the whole survey is +/- 3.5% at the 95% level of confidence. In addition to sampling error, the other potential sources of error include non-response, question wording, and interviewer error. The response rate (AAPOR RRI Standard Definition) for the survey was 19%. Three callbacks were employed in the fielding process. Live calling was conducted by trained interviewers at the Wason Center for Public Policy Survey Research Lab at Christopher Newport University. The data reported here are weighted using an iterative weighting process on sex, age, race and region of residence to reflect as closely as possible the demographic composition of registered voters in Virginia. The survey was designed by Dr. Quentin Kidd of the Wason Center for Public Policy at Christopher Newport University.