

In a recent Clarion-Ledger column, Paul V. Breazeale opined on the current situation with the Mississippi Medicaid program. Medicaid is one of the most codified programs in the country. Simply stated, this means that any expansion of our program is done through laws passed by our Legislature. Mr. Breazeale's references to how Mississippi's Medicaid program is managed show a basic lack of understanding as to how the program is run. Federal and state law dictate the eligibility rules, not our Governor.

Medicaid represents only seven percent of our state's general budget with an administrative cost of less than 4 percent. We are providing health care for almost 650,000 Mississippi children, seniors and disabled citizens.

The problems with Medicaid are not unique to Mississippi. Practically every state is dealing with Medicaid shortfalls. Rising prescription drug prices and calls for higher payments by health care providers are just two reasons for the current problems. The national recession has also added to the problem, with more Americans losing their jobs and health care and being forced to turn to Medicaid for help.

Governor John Engler (R) of Michigan has referred to the problem as "quite serious," while noting that Medicaid is growing faster than any other program among the states. Governor Dirk Kempthorne (R) of Idaho has said that in his state, "prescriptions are expected to cost almost 40 percent more this year than they did two years ago."

We should be proud of our Medicaid program in Mississippi. If you study the facts, you will find we are very successful in taking care of the healthcare needs of those who need help the most. That is the role of Medicaid. It is a responsibility that I, along with Governor Musgrove, take very seriously.