

The best ideas don't always come out of the Capitol building in Jackson. More often than not, the input and ideas of private citizens can have a tremendous influence on how state government is managed.

Such is the case with the Governor's Health Care Commission, which last week released a report of its recommendations for reforming the Medicaid program in Mississippi. The 35-member Commission, chaired by Dr. Dwalia South of Ripley, was made up of physicians, pharmacists, health care professionals and Medicaid recipients, began meeting in May to bring their ideas to the table.

At their first meeting, I told them their work would be exacting, it would be detailed, and it would be focused on the goal of the creating the most efficient and effective Medicaid program in the country. This was an ambitious charge, but one they accepted without hesitation.

Over the course of the past few weeks, these individuals have committed a tremendous amount of their energy and personal time to this effort. The results of their work reflect that commitment.

We should all be proud of the work they have done and the dedication they brought to this effort. Representative Steve Holland, a member of the Public Health and Welfare Committee that deals with Medicaid, commented "if the Legislature could work as fast as this group worked and produce this kind of report, we might be in better shape."

It is important to note that the recommendations of the Health Care Commission are just that – recommendations. They are not law, nor do they represent the actions to be taken by Medicaid. They are, however, focused and detailed options offered for consideration by the Legislature and Medicaid Executive Director Rica Lewis Payton.

The people of Mississippi would be well served by the Legislature's serious study of this report and how its recommendations could affect dramatic change in the health care arena. This issue calls for a cooperative effort to achieve results. Such cooperation was crucial in the work of the Commission, and I am hopeful that spirit will continue as the recommendations are examined in the coming weeks.

The report offers very important ideas targeted toward affecting change in six main categories. The Commission focused on prescription drugs, prevention and primary care, integrity and eligibility, access, process issues and funding.

With the increasing costs of prescription drugs nationwide and 22 percent of the Medicaid budget being used to meet those costs in Mississippi, we must look closely at how we can control those costs. The Commission identified 26 different options for accomplishing this one goal.

An additional 101 recommendations were made regarding the other five categories, many of which matched efforts already being pursued by the Division of Medicaid, such as requiring identification cards for Medicaid recipients or establishing a fraud and abuse hotline.

The issue of providing quality health care for those Mississippians who depend on Medicaid is being addressed with new energy and great ideas. The differences we can make in the lives of those people should be the driving force in our work.