

- 1) I want to be clear – I want the Exchange to work.

This is not a finger pointing session. I've been working on many versions of an op-ed without it appearing to be a partisan witch hunt.

The Exchange can be a valuable step in the right direction toward providing affordable health care for Vermonters – but only if we do it right.

There is no shame in admitting to failure... The real shame is continuing down this expensive path without considering options.

If we restructure the Exchange into one that is voluntary and ensures a larger risk pool, we can provide more options at a lower cost.

- 2) Nearly one year and \$71 million later, Vermonters are still frustrated and angry with Vermont Health Connect. It's been nothing short of a management disaster.

I know that many feel the \$71 million is federal money and is “free”, but it's still our money...taxpayer money.

Many Vermonters are also confused with the difference between the Exchange and single-payer. They've been lumped together.

- 3) Replacing the primary contractor, CGI, is a start. Should have happened sooner.

Replacing them with Optum without competitive bids and without agreed upon cost for services, however, is ill-advised.

In six months are we going to be in the same place after paying millions more?

I understand the need to move quickly, but I think it's more important to regain the trust of Vermonters. Thus far, we haven't shown any teeth on enforcing contract obligations.

- 4) We must acknowledge that plans on the Vermont exchange are not universally affordable.

Need to work with our federal partners and other states to offer more affordable options.

This could include contracting with the Federal exchange, or exploring a multi-state partnership to broaden the pool and lower the costs.

Reach out to states like Nevada that have chosen to partner with the Federal exchange – as more than half the states in the nation are doing.

Bring doctors, nurses, nonprofit hospitals into the planning process – they're the experts on opportunities to lower costs and improve quality – and keep them here in Vermont.

- 5) Let Vermonters and businesses purchase insurance directly from insurers.

I stood with the Governor when he announced this initiative, although I wanted it extended much longer to at least the end of the year.

"I was skeptical about whether we could complete it on time to sign people up," Scott says. "When the governor decided to let people delay, I thought it was the right decision at the right time for the right reasons."

No doubt some will seek to further delay the deadline by which small businesses must switch over to the new system. Both Scott and Bishop are already agitating for it to be extended through the end of 2014.

"That's what I would do, because that's what's happening in the 49 other states," Scott says, arguing that a mid-year switch in health insurance policies could complicate matters for businesses and their employees. – 7 Days, November 6, 2013

Scott agrees with this delay. He's currently out of state on vacation but in a statement he said: "I agree with those who feel the mandate on small businesses should be postponed, if not lifted altogether, due to confusion, uncertainties and the practicalities of getting the website up and running."

In a recent interview, Scott detailed many of these concerns.

"This is a huge endeavor. This is ... the biggest thing that we've faced, I think, as a state from a technological standpoint ever. So maybe we should have planned just a little bit better; maybe we should have given it a little bit more time," said Scott. "Whatever it takes to make sure that we get this right and give comfort to Vermonters." – VPR, December 3, 2013

Komline/Scheuermann proposal – will go further