

# JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE



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## Medicare and Medicaid: 54 Years and Counting

By Dennis Kalob, Ph.D.

### JSRI Future Activities

#### August 19

Fr. Kammer will participate in the Jesuit Province Commission on Ministries meeting in St. Louis.

### JSRI Recent Activities

#### June 25

Fr. Fred Kammer, Dr. Sue Weishar, former JSRI Economic Specialist Dr. Alf Bustamante, and JSRI Board Member Dr. Ashley Howard spoke at a [press conference](#) held on campus about a new report on the use of solitary confinement in Louisiana prisons. Later that afternoon Dr. Weishar was [interviewed by Louisiana Radio Network](#) about the report.

#### June 25

Dr. Weishar participated in a planning meeting of the Louisiana Stop Solitary Coalition at Corpus Christi Church in New Orleans.

#### June 28-29

Dr. Nicholas Mitchell, Dr. Weishar, Ms. Kelsey McLaughlin, and JSRI Associate Mary Baudouin participated in a Restorative Justice Circles Workshop organized by the Catholic Mobilizing Network, Catholic Charities' Office of Justice and Peace, and JSRI at Corpus Christi Church.

#### July 9

Fr. Kammer gave a presentation on social realities of New Orleans to a group of students and faculty from Loyola School in NYC.

#### July 10

Dr. Weishar participated in a meeting of the Board of Directors of El Pueblo, a Biloxi, Mississippi, nonprofit serving vulnerable immigrants.

#### July 16

Dr. Dennis Kalob attended a panel discussion in New York organized by United Nations-affiliated NGOs and titled "Lived Experiences of Inequality (Sustainable Development Goal #10): Grassroots Respond

#### July 16

Dr. Kalob attended the High-Level Plenary Meeting of the U.N. General Assembly commemorating the 25th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development.

#### July 19

JSRI Associate Fr. Rafael Garcia's work on an exhibit of migrant children's artwork at the University of Texas at El Paso, through Oct. 5., was described in [the New York Times](#).

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On July 30, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law Medicare and Medicaid. These programs were created to provide access to health care to those most likely to be uninsured: the elderly (Medicare) and the poor (Medicaid). A majority of these folks did not have health insurance; and, if they did have access to care through the network of charity hospitals, it was largely limited and stigmatizing.



President Lyndon Johnson signs the Medicare Bill at the Harry S. Truman Library and Museum in Independence, Missouri. LBJ Library photo by unknown, 34897-22. Taken July 30, 1965.

Today, it is difficult even to imagine our nation without these programs, particularly given the tremendous complexity and cost of care and the level of need as our population ages. The fact is, these programs improve the health and save the lives of countless individuals each year.

There are currently about 60 million people on Medicare, which, besides covering those 65 and over (51 million), is also utilized by certain younger people with disabilities (9 million). There are 20 million Medicare recipients who are also poor enough to receive Medicaid benefits, which are critical in helping many people access nursing home care (which is not covered by Medicare).

While Medicare is federal, Medicaid is a state-federal partnership, with the majority of funding coming from Washington, D.C. and the administrative responsibilities falling on the states (following federal guidelines, but with some latitude).

In addition to Medicare and Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) provides coverage for low income children from families that do not otherwise qualify for Medicaid. CHIP is often administered through states' Medicaid programs. Medicaid and CHIP together cover about 72.6 million Americans. Two-thirds of them are children, elderly, and/or disabled.

*The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010* (referred to as "Obamacare") provided for the expansion of Medicaid to the working poor, with the federal government initially paying 100% of the cost of expansion, gradually decreasing to 90% by 2020. Expansion meant that Americans with incomes at or below 138% of the official poverty line would be able to access this program. Several states with Republican leadership sued to avoid participating. In June of 2012, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states could opt out of the expansion. Roughly half of the states did, though a number of them have since come on board. To date, 36 states and D.C. have expanded Medicaid.

Louisiana expanded its Medicaid program in 2016, the lone Gulf South state to do so. As a result, Louisiana now has the lowest percentage (8.4%) of uninsured residents in this region. Texas has the highest percentage (17.3%).

Despite the current popularity (and necessity) of Medicare and Medicaid, these programs were vigorously opposed before passage in the 1960s. The then-actor Ronald Reagan, was a major spokesperson for the opposition. He said that if we did not stop the adoption of these *socialist ideas* we "are going to spend our sunset years telling our children, and our children's children, what it once was like in America when men were free."

I wonder today if the 80-year old grandmother in Lafayette, Louisiana feels like Medicare has stolen her freedom. Might she long to be liberated from Medicare and to experience the freedom of purchasing insurance from one of the big private companies? I don't think so.

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Monthly articles reflect the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of Loyola University New Orleans. Please send feedback to [jsri@loyno.edu](mailto:jsri@loyno.edu)

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