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Hospital tax should be passed

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Some call it an assessment, while others are quick to call it a tax.

Either way, the hospital assessment that has been included in the state budget repair bill by Gov. Jim Doyle should be approved by legislators. The assessment is backed by most major health care systems in the Milwaukee area, along with the Greater Milwaukee Committee and the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce.

Even Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce, the state's leading business group, is backing the assessment proposal, a rare show of solidarity with Doyle.

Hospitals have long claimed that the federal and state governments don't reimburse health care systems what it costs them to care for patients under the Medicaid program. Instead, those costs are shifted to private business and people covered by insurance plans, which ends up increasing overall health care costs.

Supporters of the 0.7 percent assessment on hospitals' gross revenue, led by Aurora Health Care CEO Nick Turkal, contend it could bring about \$400 million in additional federal money to the state, of which about \$156 million would go to Milwaukee-area hospitals.

They promise that would lower overall health care costs by reducing the cost-shifting that is going on. Given Milwaukee's already high health care costs and their impact on businesses, anything that could be done to lower costs must be considered.

The approval of this assessment must come with a commitment from health care systems that the additional funds would be used to lower health care costs, not put into building new facilities.