

**Volume #47, Report #244, Article #5--Thursday, December 18, 2008****BLUES BILL FALLS BY THE WAYSIDE AS SENATE G.O.P. HOLDS OFF**

Legislation enacting changes to the state's individual health insurance market, legislation pushed by Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Michigan, will have to wait until 2009 for approval because Senate Republicans decided Thursday they would not be pushed into moving on [HB 5282](#) and [HB 5283](#).

Senate [Majority Leader Mike Bishop](#) (R-Rochester) said members of the Republican caucus felt there was an effort to jam the bills through at the last minute. "Eleventh hour solutions don't always turn out for the best," he told reporters.

The House chair of the conference committee, [Rep. Marc Corriveau](#) (D-Northville) at first reacted to the announcement by saying that he had not adjourned the committee that had come into session at 9 a.m.

To help ensure the bills would not be voted out of the conference, the Senate took [Sen. Jason Allen](#) (R-Traverse City) off the committee and replaced him with [Sen. Mark Jansen](#) (R-Gaines Twp.). Mr. Allen was more sympathetic with the bills.

But, Mr. Bishop said the issue of making changes to the individual health insurance market was important, especially in light of more autoworkers needing health care coverage if they lose their jobs, and he said he had asked House [Speaker Andy Dillon](#) (D-Redford Twp.) to create a bicameral, bipartisan workgroup to develop a solution to the issues that a majority could support.

Asked when he thought such a workgroup should complete its work and the Legislature act, Mr. Bishop said as soon as possible. "We need to address it immediately," he said.

Mr. Corriveau said he had not spoken directly with Mr. Bishop, but that he is committed to working out the issue in 2009.

But the Senate GOP action was blasted by Andy Hetzel, vice president for communications at BCBSM, who said the bills were doomed by a "small group of Republican members who had worked "tirelessly to protect the interests of out-of-state for-profit insurance companies."

He warned the lack of action put BCBSM into a difficult position regarding its financial survival. Mr. Corriveau too laid blame on Mr. Bishop, saying there were enough votes to get a compromise out of conference before the plug was pulled on the whole issue.

But [Attorney General Mike Cox](#) said the action stopped a "ruthless power grab" that was unbecoming a tax-free corporation.

For more than a year the legislation has been one of the more technical and yet intensely fought bills. After winning quick passage late in 2007 in the House, the entire package was subject to a long series of hearings in the Senate before that chamber acted.

BCBSM said the bills were critical to its financial security, as the individual market was the fastest growing part of its business, but because of the way the market was structured for-profit companies could cherry pick by rejecting older, sicker customers in favor of younger, healthier customers. Having to insure the sicker people put the Blues at a competitive disadvantage, they argued.

But opponents charged that the bills would have allowed the Blues to create a monopoly in the individual market.

And Mr. Cox became one of the leading opponents of the measures (supporters charged he was trying to build his nascent 2010 gubernatorial campaign off the issue) who charged that the bills would have stripped any oversight of his office over BCBSM.

Supporters, including Mr. Corriveau, said the final versions of the bills addressed almost all the concerns of the opponents.

Mr. Bishop acknowledged that supporters said they had dealt with the concerns but that it was critical to give lawmakers more time to review the proposal.

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**Gongwer News Service, Inc.**  
 124 West Allegan Street, Suite 1200  
 Lansing, Michigan, 48933  
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