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👤 JOSH MOON

Cowardly politics and the almost certain death of the Autism Therapy Bill

By Josh Moon

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The Autism therapy bill is politics at its worst.

Actually, scratch that.

It's politics in its most cowardly form.

Because right now, the bill that would require insurance companies in Alabama to offer coverage of Autism therapy is all but dead.

Not because the public doesn't want it – they quite clearly do.

Not because a majority of Legislators are against it – it passed 100-0 in the House and would win a similar landslide in the Senate.

Instead, what's killing this bill is money.

Two of the biggest lobbyists at the State House – the Business Council of Alabama (BCA) and insurance giant Blue Cross/Blue Shield – are fighting the coverage mandate hard.

And as usual in Alabama government, money wins.

It's like there's so little of it floating around this State that our lawmakers can justify any act, any Legislation and any discrimination, if it means an extra dollar in their pocket or their campaign accounts.

And that's exactly what killing off this bill would do for a few of them.

Keep the money rolling in, for themselves and for an extremely profitable insurance company that this same Legislature has already given every break in the world. They have advantage on top of advantage in the market – hell, the Legislature even blocked BCBS's executives from having their pay disclosed publicly – and here they are back with their hands out again.

Which, of course, means the little guy gets the hose.

And you know, most of the time, we can take it. We know how this game works. We know the deck is stacked against the regular people who roll into the State House and expect the people there to represent us to do the right things just because they're the right things.

Making sure sick children can receive the care – the very affordable, very effective care – that they need to live productive, healthy lives is definitely one of those right things.

But we know that most of the time, Legislators aren't going to do that right thing. We know that they're going to bend to the lobbyists that camp out in their offices, because that's what they're paid to do, and to the money those lobbyists represent – money that pays for ads and dinners and all the trappings of important life.

But every now and again, we get one.

This Autism Bill was this year's one.

And that's what makes its likely death all the more deplorable.

Because it's not dying for lack of support or lack of lawmakers standing up for it. A few guys have gone to bat for this thing like I've never seen before.

It's gonna die by trickery.

Multiple senators have told me that the Autism Therapy Bill's death has been orchestrated by President Pro Tem Del Marsh. They said it was Marsh who kept it "in the basket" – meaning it wasn't assigned to a committee – for an extra week to run out the clock. When it made it to committee, it was assigned to the Finance Committee, which is chaired by Sen. Trip Pittman.

Pittman, who doesn't plan to run again, has made no secret of his opposition to the bill. So, no surprise, there was a public hearing and for no reason at all, there was no vote held. That is supposed to occur during another committee meeting on Wednesday.

Even if it does, we're now mere days, if that, away from the end of this Session.

The only chance the bill has at this point is a group of Senators who have promised to serve as human speed bumps until the bill gets it due. Led by Sens. Dick Brewbaker and Cam Ward, they plan to start Tuesday holding

up everything they can, including all local bills (of which there are several left on the board), until they are given assurances from Marsh that the Autism Therapy Bill receives an up-or-down vote.

In addition, bills that are important to some in Senate leadership could wind up held in committee.

See, this is why people hate politics. Because even when they win, they lose. And everyone has to resort to dirty, underhanded tricks even to get the right thing done.

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