

## Lawmakers vote to override Bentley budget veto

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By KIM CHANDLER and MELISSA BROWN

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MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) - Alabama lawmakers voted Tuesday to override Gov. Robert Bentley and enact a budget that governor had rejected over Medicaid funding.

The House of Representatives voted 71-24 and the Alabama Senate voted 22-10 to override Bentley's veto of the general fund budget.

The governor had vetoed the budget he said was \$85 million short of money needed to maintain services and reimbursement rates in the state's Medicaid program and continue a transition plan to managed care later this year. Republican lawmakers, who voted to override Bentley, said the state was working with limited funds and did not have the additional money to steer to Medicaid without raising taxes or cutting other state services.

"I do not see this body raising taxes or raiding education," said Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, said as he called for the override vote.

Bentley had sent the budget back to lawmakers Tuesday.

"As one of the lowest state-funded Medicaid agencies in the country, the Alabama Medicaid Agency focuses services to those most in need\_\_ our low-income children, pregnant women, elderly and people with disabilities," Bentley wrote in his veto message to lawmakers.

While Bentley sent a strongly worded message with his veto notice, the Alabama governor, under state law, has a relatively weak veto. It takes only a majority vote of House and Senate members to override a gubernatorial veto.

Democrats, siding with the GOP governor, harshly criticized the approved budget.

Sen. Rodger Smitherman, D-Birmingham said Medicaid could end up cutting services, such as outpatient dialysis, to make up the funding difference.

"That's life or death. I want you to understand what we are doing. Your vote is a vote to cut out dialysis for people who need it," Smitherman said.

Executive Director Kimble Forrister of Arise Citizens' Policy Project - an advocacy group for low-income families - said the budget would force "devastating" Medicaid cuts.

"We can't build a stronger Alabama by taking a sledgehammer to the foundation of our state's health care system. But that's just what this inadequate General Fund budget would do," Forrister said.

Republican Rep. Steve Clouse said legislators plan to hold joint committee meetings next week to discuss Medicaid, which is "ballooning out of control." Clouse said legislators will look at possible avenues to "contain costs."

Bentley has hinted he might call lawmakers back into special session over Medicaid funding.

