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Plan to put lottery on AL general election ballot fails; Gov. Bentley pushes on

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By WSFA 12 News Staff [CONNECT](#)

MONTGOMERY, AL (WSFA) - Gov. Robert Bentley reacted late Tuesday afternoon after it became clear a lottery amendment will not be added to the November general election ballot. Bentley called it "bumps in the road" as part of a "legislative process" but said he "won't point the finger at anyone".

"We're here to try to solve an age-old problem," Bentley said. "It's been going on for 30+ years. It's getting worse."

Bentley was referring to the state's ailing Medicaid system, which is in a severe funding crisis.

"If long-term funding does not take place, we are going to lose \$748 million, and we are going to have to cancel the regional care organizations in this state..." Bentley bluntly stated.

The governor called a special session to look at a lottery option for the state's funding issues. **His lottery proposal passed the Senate 21-12 last Friday** before becoming bogged down in the House. Senate legislation called for 10 percent of the lottery revenue to go to education and the remaining 90 percent to the General Fund. \$100 million of the General Fund split would have been required to go straight to Medicaid.

"This is all about people," the governor urged in a statement that lasted just under nine minutes. "We cannot take our minds off of the one million people, mostly children, who were born into poverty through no choice of their own, who do not have health insurance, who have no way of taking care of themselves..." Bentley also touched on the plight of the elderly and mentally ill.

State representatives were supposed to meet on lottery legislation Tuesday while the House was in session, but for a committee to meet while the House is in, it needs an overwhelming 4/5ths vote of approval by the chamber. The vote (59-33) wasn't even close.

None of the lawmakers we spoke with said they could recall the procedural rule ever being used. Because attempts to move the bill through a special session of the legislature failed to come up with a final plan before Tuesday's deadline, it cannot be added to the November ballot.

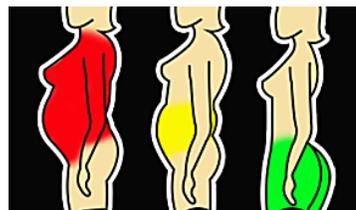
The entire lottery has been put into doubt, although Gov. Bentley says he's still confident something will be passed. The bill is not dead, but even if it does ultimately rebound and pass, lawmakers don't have time to put it before the voters and a special election will end up costing the taxpayers more than \$3 million.

"You know it wasn't us who waited. It was the governor who waited till August to call a special session," said Rep. Ken Johnson, R-Lawrence County. "It was the Senate who took five days to debate, and then to expect the House to push it through in two days? I think the people deserve better than that."

"You know, I heard one member say we needed more time to read and message the bill," said Rep. Merikia Coleman, D-Jefferson County. "The bill is what, five pages long? It didn't take me long to read the bill at all. We are smart enough in this body to read a bill and make a decision if we are for or against."

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