



No Deal On Blues, Conference Possible

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A deal on the small group market insurance reform before summer is looking more and more unlikely. Rather, sources tell MIRS that if there were any movement at all on what is commonly referred to as the "Blues" bills, it would be to a joint House-Senate conference committee.

Published reports and rumors emanating from the lobby had the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan (BCBSM) bills on the cusp of a final deal, that the legislation was "greased" and it was a done deal that opponents of the Blue Cross-preferred version of the bills wouldn't be able to stop.

An earlier version of the "it's greased" theory popped up last week, as well, (See "Conspiracy Theory In Blue?" 06/19/08).

MIRS asked House Insurance Committee Chair Virgil SMITH Jr. (D-Detroit) about these rumors. In response, he basically said he'd be a lot happier if it were true.

The main decision House leaders seem to be confronted with at the moment is whether or not they stand a better chance of getting a version of the bills they like by keeping them in their current House Insurance Committee work group status or moving them into a conference committee. This would appear to dovetail into the bigger issue of whether Blue Cross can expect to get more of what it wants out of a deal now, or look for a potential deal in lame duck session.

Sen. Hansen CLARKE (D-Detroit) said he'd been meeting with Smith, Rep. Mark CORRIVEAU (D-Northville) and Joe HUNE (R-Fowlerville) about the bills and was hopeful there could be action in the House this week.

But Sen. Tom GEORGE (R-Texas Twp.), the author of the Senate versions, wasn't part of the group and hasn't been involved in negotiations. He hadn't heard of the conference committee rumors.

But he added, "They could always concur. I'd support that."

According to talk on the House floor this afternoon, a vote against concurring with Senate changes to the Blue Cross bills could be imminent.

A vote not to concur on the legislation would send it into a conference committee. Blue Cross doesn't like the Senate version of the bills and much prefers something more in line with what the Democratic-controlled House passed last autumn.

Additional credence was added to the conference committee rumor when House Republicans caucused on the issue. In addition, when reporters asked Greg BIRD, spokesman for House Speaker Andy DILLON (D-Redford Twp.), if the legislation was going to be brought up today, he responded by saying, "It could."

Bird could truthfully make the same statement about any number of legislative packages, but the subtext was that the reporters' question wasn't too far off target. At least Bird didn't doubt it. And even though the package (HB 5282 and HB 5283) didn't come up today, there could be lots of session time (Thursday and Friday) left in this week for the legislation to possibly move.

MIRS asked Smith about possibly sending the bills to conference committee.

"That would be up to people in a higher pay range than mine," Smith quipped.