

# **IMPulse**

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**The Lewiston Tribune**  
Lewiston, Idaho  
**Thursday, March 22, 2018**  
**William L Spence**  
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## **Idaho Medicaid gap bill fails to get a vote :Calls of 'shame' greet lawmakers' decision to send measure back to committee, essentially killing it**

BOISE - It was drama on the House floor Wednesday as lawmakers once again refused to even vote on a bill that would benefit Idaho's Medicaid gap population and rein in health insurance costs statewide.

The action began with dozens of people in the House gallery chanting "Shame! Shame! Shame!" and "Save the plan; save our lives."

Shortly after the gallery was cleared, House Health and Welfare Chairman Fred Wood, R-Burley, asked to return the "dual-waiver" health plan bill to committee.

The legislation would help about half of Idaho's Medicaid gap population qualify for subsidized insurance through the state insurance exchange. These are mostly working adults who earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but too little to qualify for premium subsidies.

The bill, which is supported by the governor, initially passed out of committee on a 7-5 vote. Under normal circumstances, it would have received an up-or-down vote on the House floor. However, it was sent back to committee on Feb. 27 without a vote - essentially acknowledging the fact there wasn't enough support to advance the measure.

In an extraordinary move, the committee returned the bill to the House floor Monday on an identical 7-5 vote, prompting Wednesday's showdown.

"The last few days, I've been all but spit on by members of this body for bringing it back," said Rep. Christy Perry, R-Nampa, who led the effort to resurrect the bill. "I don't give a damn. I came here to represent my people who have tried to get some movement on this issue. I know a lot of you want to avoid a vote, but the vote is here."

Perry, who is running for the 1st Congressional District this year, has long argued that the Legislature needs to do something to address the plight of the Medicaid gap population. She is one of only a few House Republicans who has been outspoken on the issue.

Rep. Ilana Rubel, D-Boise, applauded Perry's "incredible courage," saying she's appalled that other House members would show such disrespect.

"We're here representing the people of Idaho," Rubel said. "We're not here to hide behind procedural moves. We're not here to guard our incumbency. A staggering amount of work went into putting this (dual-waiver) plan together, and it is profoundly disrespectful to not even have a vote."

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By sending the bill back to committee, she said, the only thing the people of Idaho will see "is a government that's cowardly, that's afraid to go on record on an issue of such profound importance."

Only a few lawmakers debated in favor of returning the bill to committee.

Rep. Wood, who twice cast the deciding vote that brought the legislation to the House floor, said it's just "not soup yet."

"By forcing a vote when we know what the results will be, we're trying to pound a square peg into a round hole," he said. "We need to survive to play for a different day. I intend to be back (in the Legislature) next year, and intend to bring back this exact concept."

Similarly, Rep. Vito Barbieri, R-Dalton Gardens, said returning the bill to committee could preserve it to make another run next year.

"When we debate on the floor and a bill dies, it's impossible to bring it back the following year," he said.

House Minority Leader Mat Erpelding, D-Boise, said that was ridiculous.

"We're forced to take a stand on the House floor on a regular basis," he said. "We have a responsibility to vote on the bills that are brought before us. I've never been part of a body that wasn't willing to take risk, but that's how I feel today."

Wood's motion to return the bill to committee passed on a 42-27 vote.

Of the north central Idaho representatives, Reps. Thyra Stevenson, R-Lewiston, and Paul Shepherd, R-Riggins, supported the motion; Reps. Margie Gannon, D-St. Maries; Caroline Troy, R-Genesee; Mike Kingsley, R-Lewiston; and Priscilla Giddings, R-White Bird, opposed it.

Giddings, who hasn't debated a bill on the floor all session, gave a resounding defense of the legislative process.

The question isn't whether the dual-waiver plan is a good bill or not, she said. It's whether the House should decide the fate of bills that make it out of committee, or if "back-room deals," private conversations and the governor's wishes should determine the outcome.

"My (military) friends have given their lives to make this process work," Giddings said. "This vote is about restoring public confidence and showing that we want to follow the process and vote on bills the right way."

Kingsley, who doesn't support the dual-waiver plan, nevertheless opposed sending it back to committee.

"I think it deserves a vote," he said. "I'm one of the guys who says all bills should be heard. It would be hypocritical to not vote on this one."

Stevenson supported sending it back to committee, saying she still has questions about the dual-waiver approach.

"I'm sure there are ways to come up with a better solution," she said. "I'm not convinced this bill was ever intended to pass. It seems short on details."

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State officials held multiple formal and informal informational hearings since the start of the session, giving lawmakers every opportunity to ask questions and learn the details of the complex proposal.

"There were a lot of hearings, but nothing was done to modify the bill," Stevenson said. "I was thinking we'd be working on this over the interim (this coming summer)."

The bill actually was modified in response to some initial criticism.

Gannon, who was appointed to office after Paulette Jordan resigned, cited survey results showing a strong majority of Idahoans feel the Legislature should take steps to address the gap population.

"If you're worried your vote on this might look bad, then maybe you need to re-think your vote," she said.

Following the vote, Congressman Raul Labrador, who is running for governor this year, congratulated House conservatives for rejecting the dual-waiver plan.

"The Legislature was right to reject the Little-Otter administration's attempt to expand Medicaid in Idaho," he said in a statement. "There's no question this proposal would have expanded Medicaid and made thousands of Idahoans dependent on the government for their health care."

One component of the dual-waiver plan would have shifted about 2,500 people with complex, high-cost medical conditions from private insurance to Medicaid. The shift would have been voluntary; it also provided the financial savings needed to offset private insurance premium subsidies for about 35,000 people in the gap population.

Medicaid for Idaho, a group that's gathering signatures to put Medicaid expansion on the November ballot, also issued a statement Wednesday afternoon. Saying its grassroots ballot measure is now "the only hope left" for addressing the gap population, the group encouraged people to visit [MedicaidForIdaho.org](http://MedicaidForIdaho.org) to learn more about its ballot campaign.

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