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Medicaid committee chairmen unveil report, but no bills yet

A report from the Joint Legislative Committee on Medicaid Policy was billed Wednesday as “A Pro-Patient, Pro-Taxpayer Solution to Transform Alabama’s Old Medicaid.” But when the House-Senate committee received copies of the report, committee member Sen. Vivian Figures, D-Mobile, questioned whether it was the work of the committee or just the chairmen, Rep. Greg Wren, R-Montgomery, and Sen. Greg Reed, R-Jasper.

“If this was coming from the committee, we should have seen it before its release,” Figures said. “I like to give credit where credit is due. Perhaps it should be a report from the chairmen. I haven’t seen it.” Neither had the other committee members present, Reps. Becky Nordgren, R-Gadsden, and Rod Scott, D-Fairfield. Figures said she had hoped the joint committee would have a package of bills to address positive changes to Medicaid.

The two-page report did not include legislation, though Wren and Reed said they would have bills for the committee to review soon. Instead, the report listed four “key functions” of “pro-patient, pro-taxpayer” reform: development of “strategic statewide coordinated care strategies,” coordinated and modernized long-term care services, a fine-tuned system to stop Medicaid fraud and abuse, and a cap on yearly state Medicaid spending.

Wren said he is committed to reforming Medicaid to a point where Gov. Robert Bentley will expand Medicaid to more people. The U.S. Supreme Court in June declared that Medicaid expansion to low-income adults was optional for states under the Affordable Care Act. Bentley announced in November that he will not approve expanding Medicaid “under the current structure.”

Dr. Marsha Raulerson, a Brewton pediatrician whose practice includes many children on Medicaid, said patients like the coverage they get and the freedom to go to doctors they prefer that the current system offers. “The Medicaid care system is not broken,” Raulerson said.

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