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Herbert's veto on health insurance bill should stand

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Gov. Gary Herbert rightly vetoed SB294 on March 30. This is the 11th-hour bill that makes it easier for insurers to raise premiums on most people, while lowering them for only two categories (young people and families who enroll just one parent and one child) by changing the ratio that underwriters use to determine your premiums based on your age and family size.

But key players in the health insurance industry are now calling for a veto over-ride. Alarm bells go off in my head whenever I see key industry players backing something that didn't get any public input.

SB294 was a back-room deal that should set off your alarm bells if you care about public accountability and the state's progress on health insurance reform. It was introduced on the last day of Utah's legislative session and screamed through the Legislature in less than 24 hours!

The bill undermines Utah's private market health system reform and the Utah Health Exchange, undoes legislation passed just last year, favors young people and single-parent families with only one child while increasing costs for other families and people over 45, and, even worse, it doesn't come free — the bill was unfunded even though the estimated cost to implement the bill was quoted at \$109,000 by the fiscal analyst.

What is most disturbing is how the normal legislative process was completely suspended to satisfy the interests of insurers (at least one of which has a history of fighting state health system reform) and the underwriters and brokers who stand to lose.

SB294 started out as a completely different bill carried by Sen. Stuart Adams, R-Layton.

It was hijacked on the session's last day and filled with content that undermines years of progress on Utah's Health Exchange. It bypassed all rules, had no public debate and passed at literally the last minute of the last day — 11:58 p.m. This end-run push is bad public policy and is not how our legislative process is supposed to work.



Shelly Braun is reform initiatives director for the Utah Health Policy Project.

Now, some of the industry's main players (insurers, brokers, underwriters) are on a campaign to override the governor's veto — an obvious conflict of interest. Debate about SB294 should have happened before the bill was passed.

Instead of overriding the veto, legislators should have that debate.

What they will learn is that small-business owners, providers, consumers — Utahns from all walks of life — desperately want affordable and quality health insurance and health care, not closed-door deals between the industry and lawmakers.

All we ask is that the investment we make in our health insurance plans will be there when we need it. We voted for our representatives and they should work for us.

The discussion about health insurance should be a public one.

Utah's Health Insurance Exchange is just starting to build steam, showing steady growth since its 2011 re-launch.

The same representative who pushed through SB294 at the last minute fought for his key state health reform bill by arguing that the exchange needed to hunker down and really focus on serving the small-business market.

But SB294 would force the Utah Health Exchange (at its own expense) to back-track and re-tool to accommodate the new pricing tier and the 6:1 rate ratio it creates.

This sets Utah's efforts in the small group market back by months, if not longer. State reform has been slow and incremental at best, and SB294 chips away at earlier reforms, undermining the entire process.

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