

Dems force Healthy Utah vote in House, igniting fight with GOP

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House Democrats made a bold but unsuccessful move Thursday night to revive Gov. Gary Herbert's "Healthy Utah" plan to expand Medicaid for the poor — and ignited a small war with infuriated House Republicans.

While the attempt failed, Democrats did manage to get a recorded vote that put all House members on the record as essentially a friend or foe of Healthy Utah. The attempt died 16-56.

Rep. Justin Miller, D-Salt Lake

City, made a motion to bring a Senate-passed bill, [SB164](#), promoting the governor's plan, to the House floor even though it had been defeated in committee on Wednesday.

"This is extremely unusual," House Majority Leader Jim Dunnigan told the House with a raised voice.

But House Minority Leader Brian King, D-Salt Lake City, later said Democrats carefully researched rules to ensure the motion is allowed, and had warned Republican leaders they would make it.

After Republicans voted down the motion, Dunnigan asked for and obtained House permission to open a new bill file to allow changing House rules — hinting such moves will likely be banned in the future.

Republicans then retreated into a closed caucus, but Dunnigan said that was previously scheduled to discuss the budget and had nothing to do with the Democrats' motion.



(Al Hartmann | The Salt Lake Tribune) The Utah Health Policy Project, hundreds of citizens and advocates of the governor's plan to expand Medicaid, Healthy Utah rally at noon Thursday March 5 inside the capitol rotunda.

Several Republicans said in debate that passing the motion would make committee hearings and votes meaningless.

"We have a process up here that we follow, and that process vets and weeds out both good and bad legislation," said Rep. Jake Anderegg, R-Lehi. "If this body really chooses to ignore our processes and bring this back, why did we hold it in committee to begin with?" He said it wastes time with a week left in the session.

But Rep. Becky Edwards, R-North Salt Lake, said, "I think that [for} something of this import, for us to sit on our hands and say we do not have time to debate an issue like this is on the floor is irresponsible and, frankly, it's selfish."

Rep. Patrice Arent, D-Millcreek, said, "There are few bills I have ever seen as important as this bill."

She said the House waives its normal rules all the time. She told members who opposed the motion that "I will never want to hear you trying to make a motion to ever vote down any aspect of the process."

An upset Rep. Brad Dee, R-Ogden, responded, "I'm not going to be threatened on this floor by anyone that tells me what I'm going to do tonight is going to make sure I can't do anything in the future that's within the rules of the House. That is demeaning to all of us."

After the flare up, Dunnigan told reporters, "I think efforts to circumvent the process are not helpful."

King said, "I don't know if there will be retribution" to Democrats, "but I would hope not." He added he has had a good working relationship with GOP leaders. "I hope it continues, but if it doesn't — that's the price you pay in politics on something as important as this.