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From the staff of the Tampa Bay Times

Scott's veto of Medicaid fraud money disappoints key GOP lawmaker



Steve Bousquet, Times/Herald Tallahassee Bureau

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In politics, optics matter. Gov. Rick Scott, who will spend the next few months fending off familiar criticism of the health care fraud at his former hospital company, had a chance to put more money into fighting health care fraud in Florida.

But to the disappointment of a key Republican lawmaker, he said no. One of Scott's little-noticed line item vetoes in the new \$77 billion budget would have set aside more money to investigate fraud in the Medicaid program. Scott gave no reason for the veto at the time he signed the budget.

The push for the money came from Scott's fellow Republicans in the Senate Criminal & Civil Justice Appropriations Subcommittee, chaired by Sen. Rob Bradley, a Republican from Fleming Island.

"It's disappointing," Bradley said. "No area of our budget is growing at a faster rate than Medicaid and health care, and anything we can do to contain costs in health care is important. We have to fight fraud." He said he was otherwise pleased with Scott's "light touch" with vetoes in the criminal justice budget.

Scott vetoed line item No. 1347: "\$1,500,000 in nonrecurring general revenue is provided for the continuation and expansion of the Medicaid Fraud Control Unit's data mining initiative. Funds shall accelerate and grow the project's predictive analytic analysis and data integration."

An internal Senate budget worksheet provided the "why" for the request: "Fight criminal rings robbing Florida's



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State Sen. Rob Bradley, shown here celebrating passage of his sexual offender bill in March, chairs the Criminal & Civil Justice Appropriations Subcommittee.

Medicaid system."

Because the data mining project is a joint federal-state program with the feds paying 75 percent, the \$1.5 million would have brought \$4.5 million from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) in Washington, the Senate said. The veto left that federal money on the table.

The Medicaid Fraud Control Unit (MFCU) is under Attorney General Pam Bondi, and her office did not seek the extra money, which a Senate summary of the request noted. The worksheet noted that AHCA, the state Medicaid agency wanted \$5 million more to monitor fraud in Medicaid claims: "The AG must increase their investment to deploy an industry-leading solution needed to bring down the largest and most valuable crime rings."

Scott spokesman John Tupps said the state has invested \$800,000 over the past two years for a Medicaid fraud initiative under Bondi and \$8 million to combat fraud in AHCA. "Combating Medicaid fraud is very important, and in our mission to make this the best state for Florida families, we were proud to combat Medicaid fraud in other parts of our budget," Tupps said.



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