

Insurers against workers' comp bill

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Chris Allison and Roger Smith are competitors in handling West Tennessee insurance claims, but Tuesday they told The Jackson Sun they were united in their opposition to a bill that seeks to change how employers handle workers' compensation for employees.

The bill, as it is written, would allow companies to cap benefits at five years or until medical expenses hit \$500,000. The current program allows for coverage for as long as treatment is needed.

The proposed bill could also limit what is covered under workers' compensation claims, meaning some items currently covered could no longer be covered.

"We're here because we're leaders in this organization, and we see this as a problem because we don't understand why," Smith said. "If it's not broke, then why are we trying to fix something?"

Sen. Mark Norris, a Republican from Collierville, sponsored workers' compensation changes that were approved in 2013. He said these proposed changes come too quickly on the heels of the 2013 revisions, which implemented items like judges ruling over cases in compensation court.

"I am very concerned about trashing that and jumping to a new system," Norris said. "It's premature, ill-advised and it's ill-timed if not ill-conceived."

The Jackson Sun reached out to sponsors Sen. Mark Green, a Republican from Clarksville, and Rep. Jeremy Durham, a Republican from Franklin, but did not get a reply.

Sen. Dolores Gresham, a Republican from Somerville, is listed as a cosponsor of Green's bill, but she said she agreed to co-sponsor the bill with the understanding that it didn't have her full support until she was able to fully read through it. She said she couldn't answer questions specifically about the bill.

Both Smith and Allison are members of the Insurers of Tennessee, whose CEO, Chuck Bidek, also met with The Jackson Sun.

Smith said an unintended consequence of the proposed law would be citizens paying the bills for workers who get hurt and have a claim beyond the dollar amount or number of years being covered.

Allison said workers' compensation insurance is about more than making money. "I mean I'm a conservative guy over here, and I want us all to make money and I have paying claims that aren't real claims when somebody just doesn't want to work, but this don't (fix) that," Allison said.

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