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Mark Williams, co-anchor:

Well, it's a big day in Tallahassee. Members of the state legislature reconvening for a special session. Now, while lawmakers battle over healthcare in the state capitol, the special interests are taking to the airwaves to try and stir up the public. WDBO's Rick Flagg- our Capitol Bureau Chief up there in Tallahassee joins us live.

Rick, what's the latest from this afternoon?

Rick Flagg reporting:

Well, the special session is going nowhere- Republicans and Democrats still feuding. And the Senate Republicans say there's no way the governor will get his healthcare plan.

Now, Blue Cross Blue Shield Of Florida, the largest health insurance company in the state, is spending big money today on advertising that implies your insurance could be jeopardized by the special session on healthcare. Senator Howard Foreman, who chairs the Select Committee On Healthcare Reform, says these sorts of scare tactics usually backfire.

State Senator Howard Foreman (Democrat, Florida, Select Committee On Healthcare Reform): I take all those scare ads with a grain of salt. What it really does is hurt the people that initiate them, because we know who's doing it. And, when-push-comes-to-shove, we remember the fact that a lot of our constituents were needlessly scared into writing letters or calling us in a panic- worried about losing their healthcare. Nobody's losing their healthcare.

Flagg: Supporters of the governor's healthcare plan are running their own ads to try to drum up support. But most lawmakers claim they are not influenced by these public relations campaigns.

Live in Tallahassee, Rick Flagg, WDBO News Radio 580.

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Blue Cross to delve into workers' comp market

BY STEVEN WOLCOTT

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida is planning a pilot managed care workers' compensation program, its first foray into the worker's compensation field.

The program is in partnership with Gulf Atlantic Management Group, a Pompano Beach administrator of workers' compensation services. Pending state approval, the pilot program will start in South Florida.

"I would like to see us operating, or in the market with the program this year," said Walter Liptak, president of Florida Combined Life, Blue Cross' life insurance subsidiary that's helping set up the program.

The agreement between the companies calls for Blue Cross' health maintenance organization, Health Options, to certify its network in South Florida for workers' compensation managed care. It can then be used by both Gulf Atlantic and Blue Cross customers. Gulf Atlantic will continue to underwrite workers' compensation risks and provide other administrative services.

"The experience of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida in managed care, in partnership with our experience in workers' compensation, will result in the best possible service and quality for our customers," said David Sanz, Gulf Atlantic president.

Gulf Atlantic administers the Florida Employers Safety Association Self Insurers

Fund. The fund currently covers more than 60,000 employees. Blue Cross talked to several South Florida workers' compensation companies, Liptak said, but chose Gulf Atlantic because it was more aggressive than the others.

Liptak said the state did two workers' compensation managed care pilots in 1992, one in Tampa and one in South Florida. It was at that time Blue Cross decided to look into getting into the workers' compensation market, he said. When the Legislature in special session last November mandated workers' compensation managed care by 1997, Liptak said Blue Cross accelerated their research

and started the pilot program.

Liptak said Blue Cross and Gulf Atlantic will work out details such as the cost of the pilot program in the next two or three months, although "it is not a multimillion dollar budget."

A Blue Cross spokesman said there are no plans right now to expand the pilot program to the rest of the state. Liptak said Blue Cross' lack of experience with the workers' compensation market is causing it to be cautious.

"That is certainly the reason we don't want to jump into this," Liptak said. "It's quality we're after. Also, we've got to make sure it generates a profit for us."