

Cansler Leaving

Health and Human Services Secretary Lanier Cansler is leaving Gov. Beverly Perdue's Cabinet at the end of the month to return to the private sector. Perdue announced Friday that Cansler, a Republican in a Democratic administration, would head a new commission that the governor has yet to assemble on affordable health care in the state. The governor's senior policy adviser - Al Delia - will become acting HHS secretary early next month. The department receives \$4.5 billion in state funds, or nearly one-quarter of the state's budget, to run Medicaid, mental health facilities, social services and other health programs. Cansler's last day will be Jan. 31, according to department spokeswoman Renee McCoy. Cansler was unavailable for an interview late Friday because McCoy said he was talking to staff about the transition. He was quoted in Perdue's release as saying he had been honored to serve on Perdue's staff "as she steered the state through incredibly difficult times and stabilized North Carolina's fiscal house." "We cut spending, eliminated waste and consolidated agencies - all to make state government more efficient without neglecting our core mission of serving the people," Cansler, 58, said in a prepared statement.

Cansler's department had taken heat recently from Republican legislators for managing the Medicaid program and the costs related to a new claims processing system. Cansler and other Perdue administration members had been at odds with the Legislature in the past few months over how to close a Medicaid budget shortfall of nearly \$150 million. Perdue said in the statement she will miss Cansler's "calm, wise advice" but that she would "continue to rely on his counsel." "The state is better for his service," she added. Cansler, from Asheville, served in the House for three terms before leaving in 2001 to become deputy HHS secretary in Gov. Mike Easley's administration. He left in 2005 and started a consulting business. Cansler's consulting clients included Computer Sciences Corp., which landed a contract announced in late 2008 to complete an overhaul of North Carolina's Medicaid billing system. The project has yet to be completed, and a state audit finalized for release this week said a Medicaid agency didn't fully document details on how the delays came about. Cansler said he's kept the project at arm's length while secretary and hasn't been involved in the contract details to avoid conflict-of-interest issues.

Delia, a former East Carolina University administrator, is a "trusted adviser" to Perdue who will be ready to go to work when he assumes the post, Perdue spokesman Mark Johnson said. Asked why Delia was named an acting replacement, Johnson said Delia and the governor "will assess the long term leadership needs and structure at the department." (Gary D. Robertson, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, 1/13/12).