

Health Still a Top Political Issue

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Sen. Kathleen Vinehout writes about Gov. Scott Walker's recently revealed health care plan, what the Affordable Care Act (ACA) does for all of us, and how the governor contradicts himself.

ALMA, WI - "ObamaCare must be repealed immediately," begins Governor Walker's health plan for America.

Recently the governor unveiled his health plan to eliminate the Affordable Care Act (ACA). He chose Minnesota as the backdrop - a state whose state-based marketplace offers health premiums to families that are over three hundred dollars less a month than Wisconsin's federal marketplace according to research by the Commonwealth Fund.

In his new plan, the governor would give states the ability to create high-risk insurance pools – something Wisconsin had and Walker repealed in his 2013 budget. If we had kept this high-risk pool for a few more years, premiums in Wisconsin – for those who buy insurance on their own or as a small business – would have likely been lower.

Walker's new plan would allow farmers and others to band together in health insurance cooperatives – something Wisconsin law and the Affordable Care Act already allow.

The governor says his plan would encourage flexibility in state insurance laws and "allow plans to be sold across state lines". However, "selling plans across state lines" is really insurance industry code words for eliminating state regulation. You cannot both increase state regulations

and get rid of them.

Walker's team wrote, "My plan would give states increased flexibility. For example, it is likely many states would choose to extend rules allowing young people to stay on their parents' plan. Some states, including Wisconsin, extended this option to young people before ObamaCare's federal mandate."

This statement is in direct conflict with his actions. When the governor signed his 2011 budget, he repealed the state law I authored to keep adult children on their parents plan until age 27.

The governor ended his proposal by calling out Democrats and then taking credit for the BadgerCare coverage expanded under Democrats.

The good news – for those of us enthusiastic about health care for all – is that health was the first major policy proposal put forth by the governor-want-to-be-president.

Governor Walker knows health is still a top political issue.

But repealing ObamaCare may not be the best political wagon upon which to hitch your presidential campaign. In a recent poll of 1,200 adults, Kaiser Family Foundation found people are about evenly split on attitudes toward the health law (44% favorable, 41% unfavorable) but are overwhelmingly concerned about prescription drugs. Respondents, including a large majority of Republicans, say drug costs are unreasonable (72%), drug companies put profits before people (74%). Respondents agree with requiring drug companies to release to the public how they set their prices (86%) and allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices (83%).

Only 28% of the 1,200 adults responding to the August poll said they want the Affordable Care Act repealed.

People like covering their adult children on their insurance until age 26. They don't want 19

million people to lose health insurance. Most people think women should not be charged higher premiums than men. People like the preventive services now covered by Medicare and don't want to pay exorbitant drug costs when they fall into Medicare's 'doughnut hole'. And most people don't think a friend diagnosed with cancer should lose his or her health insurance.

People want Congress and those at the statehouses to solve problems, not play politics. If I heard this once at the local fairs, I heard it a hundred times. When I wrote to constituents that the governor's just-signed state budget included health provisions that would likely break federal law, I also heard back from folks saying they did not want the governor's political ambitions to drive the state budget.

Over the next year, the state will apply for several "waivers" or special permission from the feds to change programs for those of modest means - BadgerCare and long-term care for frail elderly and disabled folks - FamilyCare and IRIS.

New drug testing requirements, dropping BadgerCare recipients after 48 months (for those without children at home) and giving disabled and frail elderly no other option than a for-profit HMO might make good political fodder but probably don't jive with federal law.

Governor Walker makes a lot of health care promises, but we must question if his proposals put health insurance companies ahead of people's health.

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