

Bill Kaplan: Next on health care?

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The Trump administration is engulfed in scandals. Special counsel Robert Mueller is investigating “any links and/or coordination between the Russian government and individuals associated with the campaign of President Donald Trump” along with “any matters that arose or may arise directly from the investigation.” Trump is in the midst of an impending constitutional crisis, with his threats against Mueller and his tweet on pardon powers. Moreover, there is nothing to show for regular folks. No infrastructure program to rebuild roads, bridges, mass transit and waterworks. And, no tax reform to make federal taxes fairer and more progressive.

Any wonder that Trump has the lowest approval ratings of all modern era presidents? Trump’s solution is to revamp his PR-sales team. Gone – White House press secretary Sean Spicer and downsized – White House chief of staff Reince Priebus. Ascending – communications director Anthony Scaramucci, a tycoon and former finance chair for Governor Scott Walker’s failed presidential quest. Nothing will change. Trump and the GOP-led Congress continue to be obsessed with repealing the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and perhaps passing a so-called replacement. The GOP-led Senate will try again on Tuesday.

Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson, hemming and hawing, complained about not having the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) score on the Senate GOP’s “latest version”. Here are all the CBO scores: Simple repeal of the ACA – 32 million more uninsured; “latest version” of Senate GOP replacement – 22 million more uninsured, including 15 million fewer on Medicaid; previous Senate GOP bill – 22 million more uninsured; House-passed bill – 23 million more uninsured and previous House plan – 24 million more uninsured. Contrast all the GOP schemes with the central accomplishment of the ACA – sharply reducing the uninsured rate from 16 percent to 9 percent. Well over 20 million, including 216,355 Wisconsinites, gained coverage. What to do?

Stop trying to repeal or sabotage the ACA. Most of all stop terrifying the disabled, elderly and sick, all of us at some point. A trio of moderate GOP senators – Maine Sen. Susan Collins, West Virginia Sen. Shelley Moore Capito and Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski – have indicated they have had enough. Moreover, a bipartisan group of governors said: “The Senate should immediately reject efforts to repeal the current

system (ACA) and replace sometime later. This could leave millions of Americans without coverage.” Thank you Ohio GOP Governor John Kasich. Missing in action – Wisconsin GOP Governor Scott Walker. How about bipartisan cooperation to make the ACA better? One possibility.

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Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin has introduced legislation “to help stabilize the health care marketplaces (exchanges) by permanently appropriating the cost-sharing reductions (out-of-pocket co-payments and deductibles), included in the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and making cost-sharing reduction payments available to more Americans.” Senator Johnson has criticized Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell for a “political blunder” in pursuing a partisan strategy. Accordingly, why not join Baldwin’s effort in “strengthening the health care market and lowering health costs more for Wisconsinites”?

Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C. for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995-2009.