

Johnson open to ‘short-term’ Obamacare fix if GOP fails to reach deal

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U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson said today he'd be open to a "short-term market stabilization bill" addressing issues with the Affordable Care Act if Republicans struggle to replace the law.

The Oshkosh Republican is part of the Senate Republican group working on a health care bill following the House's passage of the American Health Care Act.

Johnson told reporters today at the state Capitol there are "real problems with the House bill" that the group will try to work out, though he gave the House GOP credit for passing a bill to address the "real mess" that Obamacare created.

Johnson said he's open to passing a bill that would likely spend a few billion dollars aimed at helping address the "collapsing" insurance markets. He said his position is "probably a minority view" among his Senate GOP colleagues.

"If we have a hard time coming to consensus, and I think it will be difficult, I'd be willing to do a short-term market stabilization bill just to provide the insurance carriers some certainty so they don't pull out [of the marketplaces], so they don't artificially boost premiums even further," he said after addressing the Assembly Republican caucus today.

He said he liked some elements of the House GOP bill, particularly its efforts to give more flexibility for states to manage their Medicaid programs rather than having a "one-size-fits-all model" from Washington.

But he took issue with how the bill tackles subsidies for people to pay for insurance premiums, saying the bill reduces how much money goes into paying for those subsidies but actually expands who is eligible for them.

"That never made sense to me," he said.

Johnson was also asked about Congressional Budget Office projections that 23 million people would become uninsured under the bill by 2026, saying that figure includes millions who would opt against getting health care coverage once the ACA mandate goes away.

“Given the freedom they’re not going to buy these overly inflated health care policies,” Johnson said. “They can’t afford it.”

He said his main goals in the Senate discussions include that the bill brings premiums down and does not “pull the rug out from under anyone.” He said he’s pressing those he’s talking to to show how the measures they’re pushing are “going to actually address those goals.”

“I’m saying, ‘Show me your math,’” he said.

Johnson, who chairs the Senate homeland security committee, also declined to comment on reports that President Trump had pushed former FBI Director James Comey to stop an investigation into ties between Russia and his campaign officials.

Johnson said since he’s not in the Senate intelligence committee, he’s not privy to key details.

He said he hopes Robert Mueller, the special counsel appointed by the Department of Justice to handle the investigation, will look into the leaking of classified information to reporters.

But he said the special counsel process will make the process slower.

“The reality is it’s gonna slow down what I thought was a real priority — the Senate intelligence committee’s investigation and them issuing a report so we can know what else we need to do [and] so I can actually answer some of these questions with real information as opposed to speculation,” he said.

Johnson addressed the Assembly GOP at the invitation of Speaker Robin Vos, who has had other members of the congressional delegation in to speak to his colleagues. U.S. Rep. Sean Duffy, R-Wausau, also dropped by caucus briefly today after accompanying his child to the Capitol as part of a field trip.

Listen to the audio:

<http://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/ron-johnson-qa>