

# Johnson says he's 'not ready' to vote for Senate health care bill

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U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson said he and his constituents “need time to go through” the Senate GOP health care bill released Thursday before he decides how to vote on it.

Johnson got national attention for releasing a statement with three other conservatives saying they're “not ready to vote for the bill.” The four senators — enough to put Senate passage of the bill at risk — said they're open to negotiating and getting more information before the Better Care Reconciliation Act comes to the floor.

Johnson told reporters in Washington after the statement came out that Senate GOP leaders seem to think there's “plenty of time” for senators to vote on the bill by the end of next week. But he said that's likely not enough time for him to see how it affects Wisconsin's health care industry and his constituents.

“I just have a hard time thinking those things are going to be answered ... by the end of next week,” he said, according to audio his office provided.

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The Oshkosh Republican, in his second term, also said he wants to talk to Gov. Scott Walker and state lawmakers to see how they view it, as well as read over the score from the Congressional Budget Office.

“All these things take time, and we don't even have the information yet in terms of scores,” he said.

The bill was released after weeks of closed-door meetings. It repeals several Affordable Care Act taxes — an action critics say would be a giveaway to corporations and wealthy Americans. It caps the amount of money states get to

manage their Medicaid programs for low-income Americans, moving the program away from the current open-ended funding commitment from the feds.

It removes the individual mandate and a separate employer coverage mandate under the Affordable Care Act, cuts off Medicaid funding for Planned Parenthood for a year and lets states define what should be considered essential health benefits that insurers need to cover. And older enrollees could now see premiums that are five times higher than younger ones; the Obamacare limit is three-to-one.

After the bill came out, Johnson had released a statement with three other conservatives — U.S. Sens. Ted Cruz, Mike Lee and Rand Paul — saying they are “not ready to vote for the bill.”

“There are provisions in this draft that represent an improvement to our current health care system but it does not appear this draft as written will accomplish the most important promise that we made to Americans: to repeal Obamacare and lower their health care costs,” they said.

House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Janesville, said at his weekly news conference it’s “very good” that the Senate bill takes a similar path to the House one.

But he declined to weigh in on the specifics of the bill, saying the Senate “gave us space” to develop the House GOP bill and he’ll do the same.

“This system is in a tailspin,” Ryan said. “We made a promise that we would repeal and replace this law. I’m very happy that the Senate has gone through the work of putting together a bill that keeps that promise, so yeah, I’m eager for them to pass it, but I’m not going to opine on the details.”

U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin blasted the bill, saying families will “pay more for less care” and that the bill would increase the number of people who are uninsured.

Baldwin, D-Madison, said the issue is particularly pressing to her because she “was branded as a child with a pre-existing condition” due to an illness she had growing up. Wisconsin families, she said, will now “lay awake wondering if the health care they have today will be there tomorrow.”

“For Wisconsin families struggling to get ahead, this repeal plan has no heart and people are scared that it will make things worse. ... The guaranteed protections and care that you have today are weakened and now, politicians in Madison will decide

whether you keep the care you have, or whether it is taken away,” she said.

The Senate bill also has a longer phase-out of the Medicaid expansion under ACA than the House bill — something Walker earlier flagged as a concern.

“Any bill that allows the Obamacare Medicaid expansion to grow is not a repeal of Obamacare,” Walker spokesman Tom Evenson said. “Governor Walker supports a repeal of Obamacare and believes it is better to cap enrollment and make it easier and more affordable to obtain coverage in the marketplace.”

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