

Pocan: GOP will pay ‘big, big price’ for health care bill in 2018

Posted on Monday, Jun 12, 2017

U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan this week railed against the House GOP health care bill, predicting Republicans will pay a “big, big price” at the polls next year.

The co-chair of the House Progressive Caucus D-Town of Vermont, told a WisPolitics.com breakfast in DC that the Affordable Care Act isn’t perfect but Republicans have refused to work with Dems on fixing it. Instead, he said, Republicans are “so bent on getting rid of Obamacare” that they decided to develop a proposal leading to 23 million more people becoming uninsured by 2026.

Though it’s unclear what changes the Senate will seek, he said, the House GOP bill spends less on people’s health care and cuts taxes for the wealthy.

“What we have is a giant talking point that just so happened to deliver \$600 billion in tax breaks,” he said.

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The GOP’s American Health Care Act would bring back high-risk pools in states that decide to set them up, aiming to provide coverage options for those with pre-existing conditions. House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Janesville, has pointed to the high-risk pool Wisconsin had before the Affordable Care Act as a model for the rest of the country.

But Pocan pushed back against Ryan’s claims, saying his days in the Legislature on the budget committee taught him the state’s Health Insurance Risk Sharing Plan had many flaws.

Critics say HIRSP, which covered around 22,000 people in 2012, offered few choices and that it was too expensive.

HIRSP's low-deductible plan, for example, had monthly premiums in 2013 of \$399 for men between 19 and 24 years old but that went up to \$1,500 for those 60 or older, according to the Legislative Fiscal Bureau. Premiums for the high-deductible plan were between about \$100 and \$465 each month.

"This high-risk pool fantasy is not gonna work," he said.

Pocan said the "public sentiment is really strong" for moving to a single-payer Medicare-for-all system, saying his town halls increasingly end up with people bringing that up. He said that would boost access to primary care, helping people with their medical issues before they land in the emergency room and drive up costs for the entire system.

Pocan also slammed Republicans for considering eliminating cost-sharing subsidies for those on Obamacare plans, saying if those payments to insurers go away, the country will "see the system fail."

He said the GOP should instead focus on ways to improve the ACA.

"It seems very inside-the-Beltway to have this great theory about health care and Ayn Rand ... when tens of millions of people are going to lose access," he said.

On other topics:

*Pocan said U.S. Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner, R-Menomonee Falls, is the "gold standard for town halls" and said his GOP colleagues should follow that example, instead of doing telephone town halls with hand-picked questions.

"He's alive, right? He's surviving. So, you know, you can do them. You can actually talk to your constituents and maybe get their respect," he said.

*Pocan also said he missed former GOP U.S. Rep. Reid Ribble, who "came here for all the right reasons" but got frustrated at the lack of progress in Congress.

But Pocan said he spent half of a day with Ribble's 8th CD successor, U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher, doing a town hall and appearing on a TV show with the Green Bay Republican. And, he said, Gallagher joined him on his "Magic Monday" YouTube series showing magic tricks that explain how Congress works.

"Anyone who's willing to do that has got to be a good person," he joked.

*Pocan said President Trump's infrastructure push is a "bait and switch" because it invests in tolling and privately-funded roads instead of focusing on things like aging bridges, broadband and water infrastructure to prevent issues like those in Flint, Mich.

The issue early on was one that some thought would get Dem backing, but Pocan said he "doubts we're going to be there" supporting the effort.

*Pocan repeated his comments from the state Dem Party convention that the GOP is pushing a "false narrative" that no one wants to run against Gov. Scott Walker.

He also advised Dems looking at a bid to avoid announcing too early and kicking off a "presidential-style death march" that will only help Walker. Dems, he said, don't "need to have someone now."

"There are plenty of ways to go after Scott Walker, and we will have multitude of good candidates," he said.

Listen to the breakfast:

<https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/mark-pocan-breakfast/s-JA8Oa>