

Bill Kaplan: October surprise for Trump and Walker

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Trump and Wisconsin GOP Governor Scott Walker are in permanent scorched earth campaign mode. However, reality is intruding. The headline said it all: “Stocks post slight gains as an ugly week on Wall Street comes to a close” (Washington Post). The stock market lost nearly 1,400 points over two days. Fear of rising interest rates on top of soaring deficits and a Trump-initiated global trade war. Trump has a scapegoat, the Federal Reserve (led by Trump appointees). Earlier, in February, the stock market plunged more than 1,000 points, “the worst single day decline in the Dow Jones average in history” (New York Times) as Trump said the economy was booming.

Put on your seatbelts. America is in for a rough ride. The prosperity touted by Trump and Walker is fragile. Annual pay for corporate executives is skyrocketing, while wages for regular folks remain flat. Moreover, there is rising wealth inequality. “The richest 5 percent of Americans have captured 74 percent of the wealth ...” (Washington Post). Deregulation and tax cuts for corporations and the rich are taking America back to the Great Recession (2007 – 2009). With the bear at the door Trump and Walker engage in deception, while making life miserable for regular folks.

Trump, in a USA Today op-ed said: “As a candidate, I promised that we would protect coverage for patients with preexisting conditions and create new health insurance options I have kept that promise... .” Similarly, Walker said: “We want to guarantee coverage for individuals with preexisting conditions.” Left unsaid is that the Trump administration, in response to a GOP-led lawsuit, does not legally support the Affordable Care Act requirement that insurers cover folks with preexisting conditions and not charge more. Walker is the circus ringmaster for the lawsuit. Democratic gubernatorial candidate Tony Evers has demanded that Walker drop the lawsuit.

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Moreover, the Republican option for cheaper health care is short-term insurance. It covers next to nothing, allowing insurers to exclude preexisting conditions or charge more based on health status or gender. Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin calls it “junk insurance”. Last week, Baldwin nearly prevailed in getting the Senate to block Trump’s plan, falling short by one vote. Baldwin said: “One of the plans (short-term) sold in several states, including my home state of Wisconsin, marketed by Golden Rule company, doesn’t even have to cover hospital care on a Friday or Saturday. So, it will be just your bad luck if you happen to get sick and need health care on the weekend.”

And, if meanness is not enough, then just lie. Wisconsin’s roads and bridges are crumbling with no Walker plan. Evers has said raising the gas tax (32.9 cents per gallon since 2006) should be an option. Walker has an ad on gas station pump screens claiming Evers would raise the tax by \$1. That’s a lie. Unlike Walker, President Reagan showed real leadership in raising the (federal) gas tax in 1982. The real October surprise is more voters connecting the dots.

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