Senate rejects pre-existing conditions bill

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The state Senate Wednesday rejected a bill to provide new state protections for those with pre-existing conditions, which became a central issue in the fall campaigns.

GOP Sens. Dave Craig, of Big Bend, and Chris Kapenga, of Delafield, joined Dems in shooting down the bill 16-17.

Craig told WisPolitics.com afterward that he sought to amend the bill with a "state-based solution" that included high-risk insurance pools. But once that amendment was rejected, the bill too closely resembled "the failed Obamacare mess."

Dems slammed the proposal as inadequate because it didn't include any caps on coverage costs for consumers. They tried to amend the bill to include caps on out-of-pocket expenses, but Republicans shot down the amendment.

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"This legislation becomes a very cruel joke on people with pre-existing conditions," said state Sen. Jon Erpenbach, D-Middleton.

Among other things, the Affordable Care Act prohibits health insurance policies from imposing preexisting condition exclusions.

If that protection went way, the bill would require every health insurance policy to accept anyone applying for coverage regardless of whether that person has a preexisting condition.

No Republicans stood during the debate in the Senate to address the bill's merits.

The Dems who knocked it included Sen. LaTonya Johnson, D-Milwaukee, who told the chamber she was diagnosed with a tumor not long after her election to the Legislature and would have died without health insurance.

Johnson also choked up recalling not being able to take her daughter to the doctor because she couldn't afford it.

"I am just so angry right now," Johnson said, accusing Republicans of wasting time and resources on the extraordinary session when there were more pressing issues concerning Wisconsin residents.