

‘UpFront’: Palm ‘more optimistic’ Wisconsin will take federal dollars for Medicaid expansion

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Department of Health Services Secretary Andrea Palm says she is “more optimistic” Wisconsin will end up taking federal dollars to expand health care coverage to low-income residents.

The Evers administration says the governor’s plan to take federal money available through the Affordable Care Act would provide coverage to an additional 82,000 people.

But Republican legislative leaders have opposed it. Over the weekend, GOP Assembly Speaker Robin Vos tweeted “#never” in response to a published report that some Senate Republicans are open to compromise with Evers on the issue.

“UpFront” host Adrienne Pedersen asked Palm on Sunday’s “UpFront,” which is produced in partnership with WisPolitics.com, how the administration would get Republicans on board.

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“We are really trying to have a new conversation, and a governor who has put on paper what happens when you save \$324.5 million and draw down \$1.6 billion in new federal money, what kind of investments you can make in health care, long-term care, behavioral health, dental access,” Palm said. “And I think that those conversations, once you see in black and white what you can do with investments, have opened up opportunities to move stakeholders, to move legislators, to get to yes on a budget that expands the Medicaid program to benefit the entire state of Wisconsin.”

Also on the program, an immigrant rights advocate says the immigrant community feels there is an “urgency” to restore driver’s licenses to people living in Wisconsin illegally, and doing so will save lives and reduce accidents.

“Regardless of how you feel about immigration, it is logical and proven that the more people you have on the road that have been tested for driving skills, have passed a vision test, know the rules of the road, have access to insurance, makes for much safer roads, of which everyone benefits,” said Christine Neumann-Ortiz, executive director of Voces de la Frontera in Milwaukee.

She said the lack of driver’s licenses for undocumented immigrants has contributed to a labor shortage in Wisconsin, which has hit the dairy industry hard.

Wisconsin issued driver’s licenses to undocumented immigrants until 2007. In his budget earlier this year, Dem Gov. Tony Evers proposed allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain driver’s licenses once again.

The issue will be featured at the annual “Day Without Latinos and Immigrants” march Wednesday at the state Capitol. Neumann-Ortiz said the demonstration is a general strike that will see dozens, perhaps hundreds, of immigrant-owned businesses close for the day, and thousands of people attend. She said buses from 19 Wisconsin cities will be bringing people to Madison.

She said the demonstration recognizes the contributions immigrants make to the economy.

“Immigrants are good for Wisconsin, and they are good for this country,” she said.

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