

Bill Kaplan: 446,000 Wisconsinites lost health insurance

Posted on Monday, Jul 6, 2020

The column below reflects the views of the author, and these opinions are neither endorsed nor supported by WisOpinion.com.

The COVID-19 pandemic has crushed the economy with double-digit unemployment in the U.S., including Wisconsin (WI). Recovery is uncertain while COVID-19 is out-of-control. High unemployment has resulted in nearly 27 million, including 446,000 Wisconsinites, losing employer sponsored private health insurance (Kaiser Family Foundation, KFF). Meanwhile COVID-19 is exploding.

Now nearly 3 million cases nationally, over 31,000 in WI. One-day records have been broken in the U.S. and WI. Doctor Anthony Fauci said: "I'm not satisfied with what's going on because we're going in the wrong direction." Fauci expects new infections to exceed 100,000 a day! COVID-19 deaths are seemingly on a slower trajectory with about 130,000 nationally and 800 in WI. However, health experts caution there is a lag between confirmed COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and death.

Moreover, Modern Healthcare reported: "Researchers found some of the most vulnerable populations – including African Americans, Native Americans, lower-income individuals, those residing in rural areas and in states that have not expanded Medicaid – were both more likely to be at high risk of severe COVID-19 illness and lack adequate health care coverage to get care if they did get sick, according ... (to) the Journal of General Internal Medicine." What is needed at a minimum is health care coverage for all Americans.

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

But the Trump administration has gone to the Supreme Court to have the entire

Affordable Care Act (ACA) declared unconstitutional. 23 million Americans, including over 200,000 Wisconsinites, would lose health coverage and 54 million (nearly 1 million in WI) with preexisting conditions would no longer have ACA protections. The Democratic-led House countered Trump by voting to expand ACA coverage and financial help. Wisconsin Democratic representatives voted yes while state GOP representatives mostly voted no (Representative Mike Gallagher didn't vote).

WI Democratic Governor Tony Evers has established a new online site to help Wisconsinites who have lost their health coverage get covered through Medicaid and the ACA. KFF estimates thousands on Wisconsinites are now eligible either for Medicaid or ACA subsidies for private insurance. But others will get inadequate help because the GOP-led WI legislature has not passed Medicaid expansion. Evers has continued to urge WI Republicans to expand Medicaid. He now has a partner.

Retiring GOP state Senator Luther Olsen has called for the legislature to consider Medicaid expansion. Olsen explained that circumstances have changed: COVID-19 pandemic, soaring numbers of uninsured and a budget shortfall. Olsen said WI can no longer leave "that kind of money on the table". The 90 percent federal funding would replace the current 59 percent federal funding for about 150,000 individuals enrolled in Medicaid (2019) and allow tens of thousands more to enroll. Will the state Senate pass it?

Perhaps GOP state Senator Jerry Petrowski, who previously endorsed Medicaid expansion, would support Olsen. But WI Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald needs to allow a vote. In 2018, Fitzgerald briefly said he would not "rule it out" (Medicaid expansion). Circumstances have changed. GOP-led Oklahoma (in 2016, 65% supported Trump) just voted for Medicaid expansion. It's time to expand Medicaid in WI.

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