

Committee to Protect Medicare: Wisconsin docs urge Trump, Pence to stop health care sabotage as COVID-19 cases rise

Posted on Thursday, Sep 24, 2020

>> **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.](#)**

MADISON, Wis. — Wisconsin physicians today urged the Trump Administration to stop sabotaging health care as COVID-19 cases surged past 100,000 in the state and [positivity rates](#) climbed this week to among the highest in the nation.

The physicians' appeal came as Vice President Mike Pence visited Wisconsin today and the debate over the future of Americans' health care, especially protections for preexisting conditions, reignited this week with the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, while the fate of the Affordable Care Act still lies with the U.S. Supreme Court.

"As physicians, we're concerned that President Trump and Vice President Mike Pence are taking a victory tour even as their mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused infections to surge in Wisconsin and people to lose their employer-based health care," said Dr. Bob Freedland, MD, an ophthalmologist from La Crosse, WI. "President Trump and Vice President Pence are putting Americans at risk, both from their failure to respond adequately to COVID-19 and their dangerous efforts to take health care away from millions more people in the middle of a global pandemic. What is becoming clearer to physicians is that the Trump Administration appears to be neither willing nor capable of protecting Americans' health and safety."

Ginsburg's death renews concerns that the Trump Administration will succeed in achieving its longstanding goal of eliminating the ACA in the middle of a global

pandemic that has [killed](#) 200,000 Americans — more than 1,200 in Wisconsin — and sickened 6.8 million people. In COVID-19 survivors, the disease is linked to [long-term damage](#) to heart muscles in both older patients as well as healthy youth. Among survivors, researchers are also [linking](#) COVID-19 to lung and brain damage and weakened blood vessels that could lead to liver and kidney disease. More than half of the people who survive COVID-19 suffer persistent [fatigue](#). And even people with COVID-19 who don't show [symptoms](#) — asymptomatic patients who make up about 40 percent of all people infected — may also suffer long-term harm to their health.

“Wisconsin families face a double-whammy from a president actively working to take health care away from people with preexisting conditions, and from COVID-19, which can damage organs and create new preexisting conditions for countless people,” said Dr. Ann Helms, MD, a neurologist in Milwaukee, WI. “As physicians, we see time and time again how the Trump Administration’s health care decisions hurt people. Whether he’s sabotaging the Affordable Care Act, opening the floodgates to short-term [junk insurance](#) that raises costs without protecting people, or causing needless deaths from COVID-19 because he refused to act quickly and decisively, one thing is clear: President Trump’s health care record puts people at risk and makes medical professionals’ jobs more difficult.”

An estimated 21 million Americans have lost their jobs because of the COVID-19-related recession and the Trump Administration’s inability to prepare the U.S. economy for widespread disease infections, sickness, deaths and business shutdowns. An estimated 62,000 people in Wisconsin lost their [employer-provided health insurance](#) when they were laid off between February and May, when the COVID-19 pandemic began sweeping across the nation.

“Taking health care away from Americans in a pandemic is like taking away the lifeboats on the Titanic,” said Dr. Jonathan Kohler, MD, a pediatric surgeon in Madison, WI. “Physicians see what happens when people don’t have health care: They put off seeing a doctor, they skip pills, and the Trump Administration’s health care sabotage will only worsen people’s pain and suffering. President Trump didn’t come clean to Americans about COVID-19 and he didn’t want to do the hard work of getting us the tests, the masks and the information that could have saved countless lives. Wisconsin still doesn’t have enough tests to turn the corner on COVID-19, we still don’t have enough masks to keep people safe, and we still don’t have the leadership we need to keep Americans safe and healthy during COVID-19.”

Seven months after the pandemic began in February, Wisconsin [reported](#) more than 10,000 cases over the past week, one of only eight states to report 10,000 or more new cases. On Sunday, Wisconsin's overall [positive rate](#) over the previous seven days was 16.3 percent, three times higher than the 5-percent international [benchmark](#) for safely reopening the economy. Wisconsin's previous seven-day period's test-positive rate was 14.1 percent. Wisconsin's high positive rate suggests that testing in the state is limited, and skewed toward those already flagged as potentially having the virus.

Even during the pandemic, the Trump Administration continues to support a [lawsuit](#) to eliminate the ACA. Republican attorneys general in 18 states are spearheading the lawsuit, scheduled to be heard in the U.S. Supreme Court after the Nov. 3 presidential election. The end of the ACA means insurance companies could once again refuse to provide care to or unfairly increase costs for 135 million Americans with preexisting conditions, including 2.4 million people with preexisting conditions in [Wisconsin](#).

In 2012, the [Supreme Court](#) decided 5-4 to uphold the ACA's constitutionality. Ginsburg ruled with the majority to uphold critical provisions in the ACA such as states' ability to expand Medicaid so the health care program covers people with incomes at 138 percent of the federal poverty level. Wisconsin is one of [12 states](#) that has not expanded Medicaid. Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers has proposed expanding Medicaid, which would provide health care to about [274,000 low-income individuals](#) who are currently uninsured. Legislative Republicans [blocked](#) that effort.