

Senate Dems use procedural move for a second time to block final vote on GOP direct primary care bill

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Senate Dems used a procedural move to block legislation that would exempt direct primary care agreements from state insurance laws.

Dem complained that an Assembly amendment added to the bill opens the door to discriminating against LGBTQ patients and offered an amendment to strip out the change. But Republicans tabled the amendment, leading Dems to object to a third reading and temporarily block final passage.

Dems also used the move to block a GOP income tax package earlier in the day. But Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald's office said the chamber would likely come back Thursday morning to vote on the package unless Dems lifted their objection to third reading.

The spokesman was not immediately available to comment on how the Senate would handle the direct primary care bill.

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A direct primary care agreement is one of several new health care coverage products that are new to the market and aren't subject to the consumer protections under the Affordable Care Act.

The original bill sought to prohibit when selecting patients for a direct primary care agreement for providers to discriminate on the basis of age, citizenship status, color, disability, gender or gender identity, genetic information, health status, existence of a preexisting medical condition, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or any other protected class.

The amendment added by the Assembly changed that to only age, race, creed, color, sex or handicap.

Sen. Tim Carpenter, the chamber's only openly gay member, recounted the discrimination he's seen and experienced. He challenged his colleagues to take a stand against allowing health care providers to discriminate against patients based on who they are.

"What you're doing is being complicit and saying the state of Wisconsin has this policy where it is okay to discriminate," Carpenter said.

But bill author Sen. Chris Kapenga defended the amendment, saying he had "no intention of inflaming anything."

"We just wanted to make sure DPC doctors are held to the same standard as what all other health professionals are," he said.

That sparked a fiery rebuke from Carpenter, who asked if Kapenga would be personally affected by the removal of any of the protected classes and said the Delafield Republican was pushing the amendment because he was a "privileged, white man."

Kapenga angrily countered that his integrity was being called into question.

"I will not sit here and continue to listen to somebody tell specifically what my intent was, which it was not, and construe a story that is a lie," he said.

"You're a liar, just like you lied on the Tesla bill," Carpenter fired back, referencing legislation Kapenga authored that was designed to allow electric car manufacturer Tesla to sell directly to consumers rather than through a dealer. Kapenga owns a business that refurbishes Teslas and sells parts for the cars, but he previously argued he won't benefit personally from the bill.