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Pre-Existing Conditions Protections Are Under Assault, but Democrats Have Tried to Save Them

By Rep. Gary Hebl

The Affordable Care Act requires health insurance companies to cover people with pre-existing conditions. It seems simple enough, even if you have an illness, insurance companies cannot legally deny you coverage. Republicans want to gut anything that has to do with the Affordable Care Act, including protections for people with pre-existing conditions. Around the country, 20 Attorneys General - all Republicans, including Wisconsin's AG Brad Schimel- have joined a lawsuit with the express intent of ending pre-existing condition protections for Americans. Here in Wisconsin, Democratic lawmakers attempted to codify these protections so that Wisconsin citizens would be protected. Unfortunately, our efforts fell short due to blockades from the majority party.

Assembly Bill 363, authored by Rep. Daniel Riemer (D-Milwaukee) and cosponsored by every Democrat in the Assembly, would have ensured insurance protections for Wisconsinites with pre-existing conditions. It was referred to the Assembly Committee on Insurance. The Committee Chair, Rep. Kevin Petersen (R-Waupaca) refused to hold a hearing on the bill.

In a last ditch effort save these protections, Democrats tried to force a vote on the Assembly floor when it became apparent that Republicans would not give the bill a fair hearing. All we asked was that the full Assembly consider voting on a piece of legislation that would help innumerable people in our state. The attempt was defeated 34-59. Every single legislator who voted to protect pre-existing conditions was a Democrat. Every single legislator who voted against protecting pre-existing conditions was a Republican.

Now, in an election year, it seems those in the majority party, including Wisconsin's Governor, are pretending that they are in favor of preserving pre-existing condition protections. We can tell this is simply election year rhetoric because when they are not fighting for re-election they are more than happy to strip Wisconsin citizens of health care protections. As the age-old saying goes "actions speak louder than words."

Democrats have worked, and will continue to work, to keep health care access affordable and health care coverage available to those with pre-existing conditions. We have not been content to simply state that we support these goal, we have taken concrete steps to see them enacted. If the members of the majority party have truly had a change of heart, I look forward to discussing our ideas with them next session.

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