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Don't Buy the Snake Oil

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I thought the days when shameless con men could get away with peddling snake oil as a health care tonic were long over. Unfortunately, some of my Republican colleagues are trying to revive that tradition. Earlier this week the Senate voted in the middle of the night (well, early morning) on a bill that pretended to protect people with pre-existing health conditions.

Neither Assembly Bill 365, as amended by the State Assembly nor the Senate Republicans substitute amendment would have protected people with pre-existing conditions if the Affordable Care Act (ACA) is overturned. Without the other provisions of the ACA, a law requiring insurance plans to cover pre-existing conditions, by itself, is almost meaningless.

Nothing in the republican's proposals would prevent insurance companies from imposing annual or lifetime limits on the dollar value of benefits provided under the plans they sell. Nothing in these proposals would require insurance companies to cover the medications that people with pre-existing conditions depend on, or limit the amount they could set for co-pays and deductibles. The only thing these proposals offer is false hope. I voted no.

Minutes before that vote, Democrats presented an amendment that would have provided genuine protections. Republicans refused to even take it up. And now they are running around pretending that somehow democrats are responsible for their failure to pass their hollowed out version of a pre-existing conditions exclusion. They are as shameless as those old time snake oil peddlers.

The protections that people with pre-existing conditions need were in the Democratic amendment, and every Democrat voted for it. Every Republican voted it down. They voted against genuine state level protections for those with pre-existing conditions. Then they defeated their own half-hearted measure. But they found the votes to keep the greatest threat to those with pre-existing conditions, their own ACA lawsuit, alive.

The only reason a bill banning pre-existing condition exclusions would be needed at the state level is if the ACA were overturned by the pending lawsuit that Wisconsin's outgoing Attorney General joined. The man who defeated him ran on a promise to pull the state out of that lawsuit.

Instead of listening to the voters, the republicans who control the legislature used their lame duck extraordinary session to overturn the will of the voters and passed a bill that prevents our new Attorney General from pulling Wisconsin out of the lawsuit. Taxpayers will be forced to pay for the lawsuit they voted to end.

So don't fall for the hype you might be hearing. Don't be fooled into buying what my republican colleagues are trying to sell. They are the ones who voted to put insurance company profits ahead of health of the people of the great state of Wisconsin. There's nothing but false hope in their half-empty bottle of snake oil called AB 365.

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