

## “HEALTHY WISCONSIN”: GOOD MEDICINE

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Some (but not all) Republican legislators are pressing the “scare” button to get Wisconsin citizens to oppose the “Healthy Wisconsin” proposal recently passed by the Senate Democrats as part of the Budget.

They call it a \$15.2 B payroll tax increase. The reality is that this \$15.2 B will replace the \$18.5 B currently being spent on purchasing health insurance and providing health care. “Healthy Wisconsin” is not a tax increase: it simply substitutes a sliding scale payroll tax for the premiums we currently pay for health insurance—and saves money in the process!

So we spend a couple of billion dollars less and we all get the same health care the Governor and our legislators get. In addition, about 450,000 Wisconsinites who are currently uninsured get covered by a comprehensive health care plan—that they pay for through an affordable payroll tax. But in total we pay less! What’s wrong with this plan?

Savings for employers as well as for the rest of us are impressive. Private sector employers who currently provide some level of health insurance to their employees save in total \$686 M per year. State and local government entities (including school districts), save \$1.3B—and half of the local savings will be passed on to us as property tax cuts (total: at least \$500 M).

Republican leaders and so-called business organizations are screaming “tax increase!”, “socialized medicine!”

Poppy-cock. “Healthy Wisconsin” simply reduces unnecessary bureaucratic administrative costs and cost-shifting and thus makes it possible to guarantee better health care to everyone for less than we’re spending now. We’ll all be able to choose our own doctor. There would be no significant change to the private health care delivery system.

Businesses that currently pay good wages and benefits gain the most: so that gives a powerful economic development incentive to firms that pay family-supporting wages to expand in Wisconsin. And it encourages out-of-state firms looking to expand to move to Wisconsin.

Firms that operate in more than one state have testified that if “Healthy Wisconsin” is implemented, their health insurance costs will be lower in Wisconsin than any other state.

Small businesses also have a great deal to gain: they pay the most for health insurance, but get far fewer benefits than larger groups are able to negotiate.

If Republican leaders are as “pro-business” as they profess, they should be leading the fight to pass “Healthy Wisconsin”, not trying to kill it. Do the math: “Healthy Wisconsin” benefits businesses as well as workers.

We all need health care at some point in our lives. Let’s not let ideologically-driven special interests take that away from us.

For our elected leaders, the underlying issue here is courage and commitment. Early in the 20th century, when Wisconsin was truly a progressive state, we initiated the first workers’ compensation and unemployment insurance systems. They were a model for America and were eventually adopted nationwide. Let’s enact “Healthy Wisconsin”. It will benefit us all—and again make Wisconsin a model for the nation.

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