

Vukmir: Enough already on Healthy Wisconsin

Time to take care of constituents instead

By Jack E. Lohman

Since State Rep. Leah Vukmir has chosen to be the poster-child for health savings accounts, and the Republicans in general are supporting her, it's fair to follow the money and ask the obvious.

The insurance industry has paid a hefty price for the loyalties they receive. They've contributed over \$600,000 to the Republican party -- and \$200,000 to Democrats and Governor Doyle -- effectively keeping the inefficient status quo and health care costs high. And incidentally, themselves in the loop.

It has been shown that health savings accounts are good for the young and healthy and wealthy but terrible for family healthcare coverage. They make HSA members more aware of the costs, but do not provide any healthcare savings. So why would Vukmir support such a lopsided proposal?

She lambastes the Democrat's plan as a \$15 billion corporate "tax" but repeatedly -- *repeatedly!* -- fails to acknowledge the \$17 billion offsetting savings in healthcare premiums to businesses.

Vukmir doesn't like the Dem's higher cigarette tax -- thank you, Philip Morris -- but she does like her proposed HSA subsidy that shifts taxes to the rest of us. It is clear that "the rest of us" are simply not giving enough in campaign contributions to warrant attention, but that's the way today's game is played. You give a little and your phone call is returned. A little more gets your proposal on the table. A lot more gets it passed and signed into law.

Conflicted politicians transcend both parties; it only seems more apparent with Vukmir because of the high profile of healthcare. Surely if significant campaign contributions were not coming from the healthcare, banking and insurance industries, we could give her arguments against Healthy Wisconsin more credibility. But they are and we can't.

The Republicans want less government regulation, yet we got exactly that when the Republican/Thompson-led legislature lifted the "Certificate of Need" program and hospital building and health care costs skyrocketed. While medical inflation has increased only 5% per year, health care insurance premiums have doubled under the Republican watch.

Why? Because the insurance companies are making up for losses from Katrina, Rita and Florida, and politicians are sharing in the industry's profits.

Vukmir claims Healthy Wisconsin is opposite the free market she supports, but she is incredibly wrong. People can keep their current doctor or choose another, or join a health care

network that will do the bargaining for them. That is exactly what Wisconsinites want, and the Republicans should listen up.

Besides, the so-called free market that has grown in the last decade is exactly what has caused our unparalleled healthcare inflation today. Vukmir wants individual health savings accounts -- Bush style -- which, of course, is exactly what the insurance industry wants. If she'd also mandate them for state legislators -- instead of their gold-plated state plan -- perhaps we could more seriously consider them. Because Healthy Wisconsin is modeled after the plan state employees have today, what could be more fair?

Nonetheless, I'll put my trust in elected politicians that get their healthcare from the same system as the voters, long before giving it to CEOs whose salary and bonuses are dependent on shareholder profits, which in turn are affected by how much patient care they can get away with NOT providing.

Unfortunately, the taxpayers are paying dearly for our "privatized" political system. Not just in health care, but also in increased taxes that result from legislative giveaways to corporations and industries that fund their campaigns. It's got to stop.

The solution, full public funding of campaigns, would cost just \$5 per taxpayer per year -- a bargain compared to the \$1300 in today's special interest giveaways. But with Vukmir and the Republicans stuck on privatization -- in this case of their profession -- I expect more of the same.

The good news is that we should see either Healthy Wisconsin pass in 2008 or a new party controlling the assembly in 2009. I'm okay with either.

Vukmir claims to be a 25-year nurse, as though that's why she opposes HW. I'm not impressed. I was in health care for 35 years and I support single-payer, as do the nurse's unions and a Minnesota poll showing 64% of physician support. The difference is that none of the latter are Republican politicians whose party received \$600,000 from insurance and health care interests. Vukmir could do better.

www.ThrowTheRascalsOut.org (political advocacy)

www.BusinessCoalition.net Business Coalition for Single-Payer Healthcare (a founding member)

www.moneyedpoliticians.com/ (Book site: "Politicians - Owned and Operated by Corporate America")

www.WiCleanElections.org (Describes the benefits of public funding of campaigns)

Blog: <http://MoneyedPoliticians.net>

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