1:05
Blair Miller -- Denver7:
All right well let's get started with the stuff of the day then for health care. So have you seen the health care bill yet – the Senate's version?

1:15
Sen. Cory Gardner:
I have not. I have not. And what I've been told is a discussion draft will be released tomorrow, but I've not seen language or finalized language.

1:30
Blair Miller -- Denver7:
Can you explain the process for me just a little bit with how these working groups have been going over the past few weeks?

1:36
Sen. Cory Gardner
I think working groups are commonly used in a variety of legislation where people will come in, present on a different issue, talk about a different perspective on the legislation, or talking about a concern, talk about an idea, and really just have a discussion about, so that's exactly what the working group is focused on, is kind of talking through various elements of a solution.

2:00
Yesterday there was a lot of talk and focus on the risk pools – making sure that we understood that if that's the direction the legislation goes, what that means and how that can help.

2:12
Blair Miller -- Denver7:
What concerns have you brought to the table in those working groups?

2:20
Sen. Cory Gardner
Yeah you know it goes back to the letter that I signed earlier on in the year. I've talked about making sure that we bring stability into the marketplace, competition into the marketplace. Because Colorado has 14 counties that only have one insurer to choose from. And that could even be more over the next year, and that's unacceptable.

2:39
So we have to have more stability in the insurance market, more competition. I've talked about my concerns about rural health care, making sure that we put in solutions to enhance rural health care. And I've talked about my concerns over a Medicaid transition. That if they pursue a Medicaid transitions where the states take over the Medicaid program, to make sure the states have the full functionality, flexibility that they need in a transition period that is long enough for them to do it seamlessly.

3:16
Blair Miller -- Denver7:
You're from one of the states that opted into (expanded) Medicaid under Obamacare. How have those policy positions been met by some of your colleagues?

3:28
Sen. Cory Gardner
Some are very, very open to it. Sen. Portman and myself, we have our own little working group on Medicaid that we've been trying to help forge some policies and guide the discussion. So we'll see as the bill progresses.

3:46
Blair Miller -- Denver7
We talk about as the bill progresses – do you think you guys are going to vote before the July 4 holiday?

3:54
Sen. Cory Gardner
That's what Sen. McConnell has said. You might want to check with his office for further clarification on that, but that's what Sen. McConnell has said.

4:04
Blair Miller -- Denver7
And what are your thoughts on that – if the bill gets indeed released tomorrow, voting a week after the bill gets released to the public?

4:10
Sen. Cory Gardner
Yeah, I mean we'll obviously have to look at the Congressional Budget Office numbers. I want to talk to some of the private insurers to see what impact they believe it will have. Some of the ideas in the bill, the insurance companies believe they would be able to reduce their insurance rates as a result. But we have to have that information and need to have a better understanding of it.

4:32
Blair Miller -- Denver7
You talk a lot about the insurance companies. I know that it kind of goes both ways between the government and the insurance companies in how these rate request hikes go up every year and how they're made. I understand that there is a bottom line with these insurance companies, but is there a gray area between looking out for them and looking out for people who might lose insurance?

5:00
Sen. Cory Gardner
Well I think hopefully, I mean if you look at what happened, 500,000 Coloradans had their health plans canceled as a result of the Affordable Care Act. Millions nationwide have had their plans canceled as a result of the Affordable Care Act. Hundreds of thousands more have insurance that they cannot use because they can't afford the deductible.

5:23
And so what we have to address is the access. Because you can have insurance but still not have access to utilize that insurance. And so that's what we have to do. Right now, the average rate increase across the country is 105%. That means

that insurance rates have risen two times on a national average what they were six years ago when the Affordable Care Act passed.

5:45
Now remember, when the Affordable Care Act passed, they promised that it would lower the average household insurance rates by $2,500. And so what we have to do is stabilize the marketplace, bring in more competition, and allow people to actually have access to their insurance.

6:02
The other idea is this: the only proposal that we've seen offered by Democrats is the Sanders solution, which is universal care. What we ought to be doing instead of trying to push everyone into Medicaid. What we ought to be doing is trying to create an economy that has better-paying jobs, that has jobs with great benefits. And that's really got to be part of this discussion too.

6:27
Blair Miller -- Denver7
You talk about the plan from Democrats, but Republicans hold the White House and both chambers of Congress. So, many have argued, why are Republicans being secretive in this process? Why haven't you seen a bill yet?

6:45
Sen. Cory Gardner
There have been – yeah, we're having those discussions on the bill. I think it ought to be an open process, and I'd like to see an open, transparent process. And I'm reminded of Nancy Pelosi, when she said, "We have to pass a bill to know what's in the bill." And I think Democrats, instead of being obstructionists in this, I hope they'll be able to find common ground with Republicans so we can have a bipartisan solution.

7:13
Blair Miller -- Denver7
And, you know, you obviously play a role in all of this too. Have you gone to leadership? Have you gone to McConnell and told him that we need to have this out in the open, and why is this not out in the open?

7:25
Sen. Cory Gardner
Just yesterday, yeah. Just yesterday at the conference meeting, it was talked about the need to have more time and transparency.

7:34
Blair Miller -- Denver7
So has the bill been sent over to the CBO yet?

7:37
Sen. Cory Gardner
So I think, Blair, what they've been doing – you'd have to access McConnell's office for that exact answer. What I think they're doing is sending ideas or concepts to the Congressional Budget Office and getting a score as they send elements of the bill over. At least that's what they said they're doing.

7:54

Blair Miller -- Denver7
I'm still hearing a lot of "This is what they say they're doing." And you talk about transparency and the Democrats in forming the ACA back in '09 and 2010. But the bill was posted in October after Pelosi said her thing, and then, you know, the final vote didn't happen until 9 or 10 months later. There were hundreds of amendments offered, hundreds of open hearings. What's the difference this time?

8:24
Sen. Cory Gardner
Well, you know, I would remind you that there was not a single Republican vote on that measure.

8:29
Blair Miller -- Denver7
I realize there wasn't a Republican vote, but there was still discussion with Republicans. I mean Obama sat in front of all of Congress and talked with Republicans for hours.

8:38
Sen. Cory Gardner
I'm not arguing. I agree with you. There should be more discussion. There should be an open pro— That's what you and I are agreeing on.

8:42
Blair Miller -- Denver7
OK, but what can you tell people in that case? If we're just putting this all on McConnell, is there any other Republicans who are going to take this blame?

8:58
Sen. Cory Gardner
Blame for…

8:59
Blair Miller -- Denver7
…For not having any transparency in this process.

9:03
Sen. Cory Gardner
Well, now, look, I think what we have to do is remember why we're in this discussion. And that's to make sure that we save the American people from the Affordable Care Act that is collapsing.

9:15
Blair Miller -- Denver7
OK. So…

9:20
Blair Miller -- Denver7
Is there any way you wouldn't vote for this bill?

9:24
Sen. Cory Gardner

If it's bad policy, I won't support it. I need to see the legislation. I'm going to read the legislation and find out how it works.

9:34
Blair Miller -- Denver7
But what would be considered bad policy to you?

9:37
Sen. Cory Gardner
Well if it's something that doesn't solve the problems of Obamacare.

9:41
Blair Miller -- Denver7
But specifically…

9:43
Sen. Cory Gardner
Well, OK so if it doesn't work to reduce the cost of insurance. If it doesn't create market stability. If it doesn't create a sustainable path for Medicaid, that's not going to be something that I can support.

9:58
Blair Miller -- Denver7
This vote is coming up soon. Where do we go after health care in Congress? I saw your interview in The Post yesterday, talking about how everything has become so partisan. How do we change that going forward?

10:14
Sen. Cory Gardner
Well I hope that Democrats and Republicans can come together on health care. Because right now you have a system in place that if the status quo of the Affordable Care Act is left in place, it will result in more people paying higher costs and fewer people having access to their insurance.

10:32
And so that's what I hope that Republicans and Democrats can do over the next several weeks. Because remember, even if the Senate passes a bill next week, there's still the process of hammering out the difference between the House and the Senate. And then it comes back to the chambers for even more debate after that. So there's even still more of this process, so I hope in the meantime, there will be a decision to instead of having just a partisan debate, that people will come together and work through these challenges.

11:02
After health care, I think you look at a number of budget issues. Funding, appropriations issues. And tax reform.

11:13
Blair Miller -- Denver7
And so we talk about the reconciliation process and the concurrence process – is this just going to turn into a game of volleyball between the House and Senate?

11:22
Sen. Cory Gardner

You know, I think it depends. I mean, you could go to a conference committee and the conference committee could hammer it out. The other option is to see if the House will pass the Senate bill, and that can volley back and forth. My guess is they'll go to a conference committee, but I just don't know.

11:42
Gardner spokesman Casey Contres
Hey Blair, we have about 30 seconds if you want to talk North Korea…

11:45
Blair Miller -- Denver7
OK yeah, so real quick. On North Korea, on Otto: Is there anything new…are there any new sanctions being eyed because of that. You know, some have discussed a travel ban.

11:58
Sen. Cory Gardner
Look, I fully support a travel ban and I fully support an absolute embargo on the North Korean government. What happened was, in essence, murder by the North Korean regime. What we ought to do is use this moment right now, as we mourn the loss of Otto Warmbier, and just can't even fathom the torture that he endured, North Korea ought to be immediately listed as a state sponsor of terror as a result of these actions.

12:30
Blair Miller -- Denver7
And have you talked with the Secretary of State at all since then?

12:33
Sen. Cory Gardner
We have talked to the State Department. I have not had a direct conversation with the [Secretary of State] – but we have talked to the State Department about this. And we have sent a letter in the past urging them to consider the designation, but this is all the more reason now to make that designation a reality.

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