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[00:00:00] **Speaker 1** I specifically, you spoke to it a little bit just a second ago, but what conversations have you had with Senator Johnson about the bill as it's heading towards the Senate?

[00:00:11] **Speaker 2** Yeah, so, you know, I've been following closely his comments saying that he will only vote for something that does not actually add to the deficit in debt, which by the way is why we came up with an expedited process called budget reconciliation. The idea was that you could, by a simple majority vote in the Senate, pass legislation to reduce the debt. It would require the typical 60 votes to pass legislation that would contribute to the debt. But that was fundamentally altered in the last couple of decades. And especially when it is used for the purpose of tax rewriting of the tax code, it has been contributing to our debt, as it did in Trump's first term in 2017. I remember when we were debating that, and it looked like it would add about three trillion. I think it might have ended up adding even more than that. And again, tax breaks that disproportionately impact and benefit the wealthy and big corporations. So I was following Senator Johnson's comments on opposing the bill, and frankly the last conversation I had with him last week was rather lighthearted. said that I saw he was going to be a no on the bill, and I welcomed that news, even if it was for very different reasons, that then I would be opposing the legislation. But you know, on my side, I have been holding roundtable discussions, similar to this on the VA, but on Medicaid, also on food security and various USDA and other. Departmental policies that help uh... People respond to food insecurity uh... And uh... I i i believe that the impact that the uh... Bill would have as passed by the house would be devastating on the most vulnerable communities uh... Add uh... Mightily to the deficit in debt and again why so that they can pay for uh... More tax cuts for the very wealthy and big corporations.

[00:02:35] **Speaker 1** And we're speaking to Wisconsin DHS this week about Medicaid and food share cuts and how that could impact Wisconsinites. State Republicans may not backfill some of those services and benefits. What is your reaction to the cuts that are proposed as they are now and what they will do to Wisconsin?

[00:03:00] **Speaker 2** The health care Medicaid cuts are estimated to lead to about 220,000 Wisconsinites losing their insurance. That would be either their Medicaid insurance or their insurance through the Affordable Care Act marketplace. That's a massive disruption and frankly, just in terms of impact, you know, not only will people who need health care not have it. And but also all of us will see costs go up if people are forced to go to the emergency room because they don't have health care to maintain their health with annual checkups and preventative care. So it's not going to achieve the goals. On the food stamp program side of things, really this is a Republican effort in the Congress to either see those programs cut to the tune that they're talking, or have the burden shifted to the states. And the states have varying capacities to be able to fill in that hole. And so combined, this is going to mean suffering for Wisconsinites, most of whom are working families just trying to get ahead.

[00:04:29] **Speaker 3** You had mentioned earlier that being on the HHS Oversight Committee, you're sort of getting Don't waltz a bit, bye.

[00:04:38] **Speaker 2** More than a bit.

[00:04:39] **Speaker 3** More, uh, being polite, by the VA secretary.

[00:04:43] **Speaker 2** No, by the HHS.

[00:04:44] **Speaker 3** I'm sorry, by HHS, and they're not telling you about, you know, the cuts that are happening, whether it's research grants or... These scientists themselves. Can you talk a little bit more about what you have been hearing?

[00:05:03] **Speaker 2** Yeah, so I'd say a combination of things. One is that Secretary Kennedy, who I've had before, one or other of my committees twice in the last two weeks, the Health Committee two weeks ago, the Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee last week. And when, you know, I asked him questions that I had not gotten satisfactory or any answers to. Uh... When i had written the department uh... And in response the you know if i don't know sometimes which is worse but it but he outright lied and i there's he's purposely misinforming the congress or he doesn't know the answers to the question i'm not sure which one is worse it's very very distressing in that case and you may have followed uh... My questioning because that got a lot of attention was on the. The lead in the schools at MPS, and 1,800 students displaced from their schools because of that crisis. And he has fired everybody who works at the childhood lead mitigation branch of the CDC. Everybody. And he said to me, no, we have a team in Milwaukee. And then when they came back around with evidence that they didn't have a team, he accused me of misrepresenting the situation. So we've had quite the back and forth. But this is not the way to do business. I have an oversight role as a senator. And when I write a letter, I should get a response. And that response should be thorough and timely and truthful. And right now, HHS is just not answering the letters. And it was only because Secretary Kennedy was sent up to Capitol Hill to finally take questions in the fifth month of this administration that we had that exchange. With regard to VA, since this was a VA roundtable, I've written several letters to the Secretary of the VA, Secretary Collins. And I do not believe we've gotten any substantive responses to the letters. Now, the letters we sent had to do with the firings of personnel and the ramifications. And I believe there was one other, and I'm not remembering what it is right now, but we can follow back up. But it seems to be a pattern throughout this administration. And I don't know if they are literally instructed not to answer congressional inquiries. Whether there's another reason, but we're not getting responses. There's no sort of back and forth, which there has been in every other administration, including the first Trump administration, and they answered our letters.

[00:08:15] **Speaker 1** And I think that's all we have time for. Thank you. Thank you!