

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
Markup on H.R. 1217, H.R. 1216, H.R. 1215, H.R. 1214, and H.R. 1213
Subcommittee on Health
March 31, 2011

Today we are considering five pieces of legislation that would roll back important advances under the Affordable Care Act for health coverage, public health, and the health workforce.

Each of them is marked by unusual irony and even hypocrisy.

Let's begin with the new and innovative Prevention and Public Health Fund. For as long as I can remember, there has been strong bipartisan agreement on this Committee that we need to do more to support health promotion and disease prevention activities that can save lives and save dollars.

Our Republican colleagues, in particular, have advocated for state and local efforts along these lines. For the first time, we now have in law a program that is designed to do all of this – it's targeted exclusively on prevention; it's guaranteed to be funded; and its primary funding recipients are community-based organizations. And apparently, it has hit home across the public health spectrum – nearly 600 national, state, and local groups have written to us in support of the Prevention Fund in the Affordable Care Act.

Yet, today, Republicans will vote out a bill to kill the Fund. That is inexcusable and goes against the often passionate arguments Republicans have made in support of health promotion programs. We should not eliminate the Fund; if anything, we should put more resources into it so we can build a healthier nation and reduce our annual health care spending bill.

Republicans have said time and time again that we haven't done enough to expand the health workforce – particularly the number of primary care providers – to meet the growing demands for services. So it comes as a great disappointment that another one of the Republican bills we will consider today cuts support for a workforce program that would enlarge the pool of primary care providers around the country. Still another would eliminate support for school-based health centers that offer this type of care.

And just when we think we're on the same page. . . . Seems like we simply can't win – no matter what we do!

Republicans have insisted on – indeed, they have been adamant about – mandatory spending support for abstinence-only-until-married education, ignoring study after study that shows this approach does not work.

The Affordable Care Act contains a proposal that would fund teen pregnancy programs – including required abstinence only education – as long as there is evidence that they are effective. But today, our Republican colleagues will vote to eliminate mandatory funding for the evidence-based teen pregnancy program and leave intact the mandatory funding in the Affordable Care Act for the abstinence only program that has been completely discredited. This simply cannot be explained or justified.

Finally, we will take up a bill that attacks one of the lynch pins of health reform – grants to states to establish their insurance exchanges. These grants are structured to allow states to develop a uniquely state specific solution and design for their individual and small business marketplace.

Once in place, these exchanges will serve as a building block to strike at the heart of insurance company abuses. Millions of people have suffered at the hands of insurance companies, a commonality that brings individuals together in their desire to be free of ever increasing premiums, from denials for valid claims, from denials for having a pre-existing condition, and from rescissions of insurance when someone gets sick.

I am not surprised, but am surely saddened, that even the Republican mantra of state based reform doesn't stop them from turning around with an ideological bill and ideological vote.

Republican claims on all of these programs have been thoroughly debunked by outside observers. They've been awarded so many Pinocchios from the independent fact checkers, it almost makes me wonder if they are trying to collect them.

But what they are doing is not fiction; nor is it funny. The truth is that the bills we are marking up today represent the Republicans newest line of attack to disrupt, dismantle, and ultimately destroy current law which:

- Expands health care coverage to over 32 million people.
- Closes the Medicare drug donut hole, provides free preventive care under Medicare, and strengthens the Medicare trust fund.
- Prohibits predatory and abusive behavior by insurance companies.
- Addresses public health challenges such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease that are literally killing us and bankrupting our health care system.
- And reduces the deficit by over \$210 billion in the next decade while achieving these goals.

I ask – maybe futilely – but still I ask that all Members give thoughtful consideration to the substance of what we are voting on today. Common sense and sound health policy tells us we should defeat each of these bills outright.

But if the subcommittee follows a different path, let's be clear about where these initiatives are coming from – not from a consistent set of Republican principles or policies, but rather from their unrelenting ideological obsession to bring down health reform. No doubt they will keep trying, but no doubt as well, they will not succeed.