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House of Representatives

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Opening Statement Rep. Matt Cartwright, Ranking Member Subcommittee on Health Care, Benefits and Administrative Rules

Hearing on “From Premium Increases to Failing CO-OPs: An Obamacare Check Up” July 13, 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today.

I hope the Committee uses this hearing as an opportunity to have a meaningful, productive discussion about the ACA—what aspects of the law are working, and areas still in need of improvement. But I’ve been on the Committee long enough to know that this hearing was called to give my colleagues in the majority an occasion to attack this law.

In fact, just the one-sided title of today’s hearing says it all: “From Premium Increases to Failing CO-OPs.”

A fair approach might be titled, “From Improved Access to Health Care to Historically Low Uninsured Rates,” or “From Reducing Medical Debt to Slowing National Health Expenditures.”

But my Republican colleagues do not want to highlight the ACA’s successes, only its flaws. That’s the kind of partisan political hearing they believe serves their partisan interest in an election year.

But another partisan hearing doesn’t serve the public interest.

Because here are some of the accomplishments of the ACA that the Republicans’ partisanship ignores: Because of the ACA, 20 million people who used to be without insurance now have access to quality, affordable, health coverage.

Here’s another accomplishment: The uninsured rate in this country is at an historic low. That means there are now fewer people in this country than ever before that have to worry about what happens if they get sick and can’t afford to go to the doctor, or can’t afford to pay for their medications out-of-pocket.

Here are a few more accomplishments: Because of the ACA, people with preexisting medical conditions can no longer be denied access to coverage because of their health. Hospitals

in states that expanded Medicaid have seen their rates of uncompensated care decline. Those states have also seen a decline in medical debt.

Yet, even with all of these accomplishments of the ACA, my Republican colleagues have chosen to hold more than 60 votes attempting to repeal or undermine the law.

However, we all know there are aspects of the ACA that still need a lot of work. For example, CO-OPs have faced daunting challenges, just as any “start-up” business would. But we must remember the reason that CO-OPs were created: To inject much-needed competition into the insurance market. Instead of taking steps to help support the CO-OPs, the Republican-led House voted multiple times to slash the program’s funding.

And there are certainly other aspects of the law that could be improved. I’m looking forward to hearing from our witnesses about how we can make the ACA better.

But I’d like to close by focusing on why we passed this law in the first place. In June 2015, Brent Brown of Mosinee, Wisconsin, wrote the President a letter, thanking him for enacting health reform. Mr. Brown, who has “voted Republican for the entirety of [his] life” but who also had a pre-existing medical condition that made it impossible for him to get health insurance before the ACA, wrote: “I would not be alive without access to care I received due to your law.”

Mr. Brown’s letter is a reminder that the ACA is about helping real people live better, healthier lives. And it’s working—unlike the harmful proposals recently put forward under the Speaker’s “Better Way” plan, which would roll back healthcare protections for women, raise medical costs for seniors, and cut Medicaid funding to the detriment of patients and providers.

After six years, Republicans still have not proposed a viable legislative alternative to the Affordable Care Act.

I would urge my colleagues to keep this perspective in mind during today’s hearing.

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