

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### Opening Statement Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings

#### Hearing on “Examining the Affordable Care Act’s Premium Increases” September 14, 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to all of our witnesses for testifying here today on this very important subject. I would like to start by reading a few headlines:

- “Anthem Blue Cross Dramatically Raising Rates for Californians with Individual Health Policies”
- “Health Insurance Rates Soar as Oregon Regulators Nod”
- “Millions in U.S. Can’t Afford Health Insurance”

The thing is, these headlines are not from today, or this week, or this year. They are from several years ago—before Congress passed the Affordable Care Act.

Of course, that will not come as a surprise to anyone who remembers how horrible the individual insurance market was before Congress passed the Affordable Care Act.

Insurance companies used to be able to discriminate against women. They could charge more for people with pre-existing conditions from asthma to cancer. They could impose exclusions and caps on coverage. They could terminate policies when people got sick, and they could deny coverage altogether.

People who were lucky enough to get health insurance were often stuck with whatever premiums their insurance companies decided to charge. These premiums were increasing by double digits every year. Before we passed the Affordable Care Act, the individual insurance market was a complete mess.

The purpose of today’s hearing is to examine recent increases in health insurance premiums. Republicans love to attack the Affordable Care Act even though it has improved the healthcare of millions of Americans.

But there is one very critical fact that they do not want you to know: premium increases have actually been lower than the Congressional Budget Office predicted when Congress passed the Affordable Care Act. They are lower than we anticipated.

Based on CBO's projections at that time, they estimated that premiums would be 12% to 20% higher than they are today.

Here is another key fact you will never hear Republicans admit: national healthcare spending has slowed even more significantly than projected when we passed the Affordable Care Act. That includes spending across Medicare, Medicaid, and the private insurance market.

National healthcare spending for 2014 through 2019 will be \$2.6 trillion less than CMS projected in 2010 when we passed the Affordable Care Act. That's trillion with a "t."

Of course, all this is happening as the Affordable Care Act expands health coverage for 20 million Americans, offers them more comprehensive coverage, and ends the discrimination of the past. As a result, we now have the lowest uninsured rate in our nation's history.

Unfortunately, my Republican colleagues do not want to talk about these facts. They want to attack the ACA for political reasons without offering solutions of their own. From Day One, Republicans have been focused on undoing and undermining this law, and they have taken every opportunity to sabotage it. They challenged the law in court, tried to de-fund it, and voted more than 60 times to repeal or weaken it. They are truly obsessed.

Now, I do think it is appropriate for this Committee to examine the 2017 premium increases. There have been reports that some insurers may have underpriced their plans in the first years of the Affordable Care Act or that other insurers may not have been familiar with this specific market. I hope our witnesses can help us address this issue today.

However, if we want to talk about premium increases, then we need to talk about drug companies that are jacking up the prices of their drugs. One of the biggest drivers in premium increases is skyrocketing prescription drug prices—and that is across the board, not just for people with plans under the Affordable Care Act.

For that reason, I am very pleased that the Chairman agreed to the request from Democrats to hold a hearing next week to examine the massive price increases with EpiPens, including Representatives Grace Meng, Stephen Lynch, Tammy Duckworth, and Peter Welch.

I am also thankful that we will be getting documents from Mylan beginning this week relating to its pricing decisions.

Skyrocketing drug prices affect all of our constituents, regardless of what insurance they have. A majority of Americans—Democrats, Republicans, and Independents—believe that this is our number one healthcare priority as a nation.

I look forward to our hearing on that topic next week, and I thank the witnesses again for being here.

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