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ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### Opening Statement

Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member

### Hearing on "Examining Obamacare Transparency Failures" December 9, 2014

In 2010, Democrats in Congress passed the landmark Affordable Care Act to give millions of people across the country health insurance. We banned insurance companies from discriminating against people with preexisting conditions, we established significant new measures to hold down healthcare costs, and we provided extra assistance to those who need it.

Today, based on the evidence before us, the ACA is working. Millions of people are now covered through the exchanges and Medicaid expansion, and according to the New England Journal of Medicine, the rate of uninsured has dropped by over four percentage points since last year. That is a 26% reduction in the ranks of the uninsured in just one year.

The evidence also shows that the ACA is "bending the cost curve." The growth of national healthcare spending decreased to 3.6% last year. That is the lowest rate on record since the 1960s. In addition, reforms of healthcare delivery methods have saved \$12 billion by reducing the number of hospital-acquired conditions.

Despite these clear benefits, Republicans have spent the last four years doing everything in their power to repeal the ACA, dilute it, undermine it, and oppose it. This has become one of their chief political goals. They have taken 53 votes to repeal or weaken the law, and last year they shut down the government for 16 days in a failed attempt to delay its implementation.

In our Committee, today we will hold our 29th hearing on the ACA. That is a stunning number—more than two dozen hearings—but not one has helped to implement the ACA more effectively or efficiently. It pains me to imagine the good we could have accomplished had we devoted that same amount of time and resources to more constructive efforts.

Unfortunately, this hearing is no different. As far as I can tell, we are here today to beat up on Jonathan Gruber for stupid comments he made over the past few years, and then to grill Administrator Tavenner about what appears to be an inadvertent mistake in reporting ACA enrollment numbers. This may be good political theater, but it will not help a single American get health insurance.

Let me be clear. I am extremely frustrated with Dr. Gruber's statements. They were irresponsible, disrespectful, and did not reflect reality. I was in Congress when this law was debated. And Dr. Gruber does not speak for me or the chairmen of other committees who worked tirelessly on this bill. We debated this legislation for nearly a year before it was finally passed and signed by the President. We held 79 hearings and markups in the House of Representatives alone. Never once did I believe, or did anyone suggest, that we were somehow hiding our goals from the American people.

But worst of all, Dr. Gruber's statements gave Republicans a public relations gift in their relentless political campaign to tear down the ACA and eliminate healthcare for millions of Americans. Many Republicans now allege some kind of Democratic conspiracy, citing the praise for Dr. Gruber's work from President Obama and other Democrats.

But that too is completely wrong. Let me highlight some additional praise Dr. Gruber received for his work. Dr. Gruber received the following thanks for his contributions to healthcare legislation: "Jonathan Gruber at MIT devoted hours and hours to an essential econometric model."

That statement was not from President Obama, but from the Republican nominee for President in 2012—Mitt Romney. He thanked Dr. Gruber personally at the signing ceremony for RomneyCare in Massachusetts in 2006.

A day earlier, Mitt Romney wrote an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal entitled, "Health Care for Everyone? We Found a Way." This is what he wrote: "Jonathan Gruber of MIT built an econometric model of the population, and with input from insurers, my in-house team crunched the numbers." Then, Governor Romney said this:

"[B]ecause health insurance will now be affordable and subsidized, we insist that everyone purchase health insurance from one of our private insurance companies. And so, all Massachusetts citizens will have health insurance. It's a goal Democrats and Republicans share, and it has been achieved by a bipartisan effort, through market reforms."

That is exactly what the ACA was modeled on and was supposed to be. But Governor Romney was wrong about one thing. That goal was not shared by Republicans in Washington.

For the past four years, House Republicans have been trying to repeal the ACA, but they never explain what they would do instead. In a few weeks, Republicans will control both houses of Congress, and they will be out of excuses. Governing responsibly does not mean eliminating essential healthcare protections for our constituents with no alternative. It means promoting the health and economic security of millions of Americans who desperately need our help.

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