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Opening Statement Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member

Hearing on "Federal Implementation of ObamaCare: Concerns of State Governments"

September 18, 2013

Thank you Chairmen Lankford and Jordan for calling this hearing.

I also want to thank you for accepting several witnesses we requested. They are elected officials from South Carolina, Florida, and Louisiana. Unlike the witnesses invited by the majority, these officials have tried to implement the Affordable Care Act, even in the face of obstruction coming directly from their own governors' offices.

Unfortunately, there is a systematic effort by some Republican officials to obstruct implementation of the Affordable Care Act. These officials have openly pledged to fight implementation, harassed entities attempting to conduct public education and outreach, and adopted legislative and regulatory maneuvers to sabotage the Affordable Care Act.

Last week, Chairman Upton sent letters to 51 state navigator organizations, demanding that these community organizations turn over huge amounts of documentation to the Committee on Energy and Commerce. As Norm Ornstein noted, "This is intimidation and another effort at sabotage."

Some Republican state officials have taken a page from the same playbook. West Virginia's Attorney General, Pat Morrissey, recently sent letters to navigator grantees in his state, demanding answers to dozens of questions. One recipient, West Virginia Parent Training and Information, subsequently returned the \$365,000 grant that it had applied for and won. Other states are acting the same way.

The problem is that there are tens of millions of people who desperately need the Affordable Care Act to succeed, including in these very states. And they need Members of Congress to do our job and help it succeed through responsible oversight.

If I may, I would like to introduce Ms. Acqualyn Laury, a resident of Virginia and the victim of a stroke she suffered in college, as well as a series of other serious health problems. Ms. Laury, will you please stand?

Like millions of other Americans, she has what insurance companies call a pre-existing condition. Ms. Laury traveled here today to present her story to Congress. Since the majority declined to seat her at the witness table, I would like to read from her statement. She writes:

In 2005, I decided to leave my job at a large employer to pursue my dream of owning my own business. However, later that year, I needed emergency gall bladder surgery and suffered complications. At that point, my insurer rescinded my coverage and left me with \$50,000 in medical bills during my first year in business. If the Affordable Care Act had been in place back then, it would have been against the law for my insurer to drop me from coverage. ...

I'm looking forward to the opening of the Health Insurance Marketplace in Virginia this October and the availability of the new Health Insurance Premium Tax Credit that could potentially make my health insurance even more affordable. I'm also very appreciative that I no longer have to worry ever again about being denied coverage due to my pre-existing conditions, being charged exorbitant premiums that I can't afford, or having my coverage dropped if I need another hospital stay.

Ms. Laury, thank you for coming. By telling us the story of your life, you speak for millions of Americans just like you. I ask that Ms. Laury's statement be entered into the record.

The truth is that nobody really believes today's hearing was intended to help make the Affordable Care Act work better. Republicans have taken more than 40 votes on the House floor to repeal ObamaCare and replace it with absolutely nothing. Everyone knows what this hearing is really about—trying to end ObamaCare.

This very week, House Republicans are threatening to shut down the entire government unless the Affordable Care Act is completely defunded. Republicans want to eliminate health coverage for tens of millions of Americans, return the keys to the insurance companies, and go back to the days of discrimination against people like Ms. Laury with preexisting conditions.

Our constituents deserve better. So I appeal to my Republican colleagues. What matters is that we help our constituents. What matters is that we fulfill the mission of this Committee, which the Chairman articulates at the start of every hearing: "Americans deserve an efficient, effective government that works for them."

I wholeheartedly agree. The Affordable Care Act is the law of the land. It has been upheld by the Supreme Court. As members of this Committee, our job is to conduct meaningful oversight. To make the law work better. To make implementation of the law more effective and efficient.

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