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Congress of the United States

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Opening Statement

Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member

Hearing on "Examining ObamaCare's Problem-Filled State Exchanges"

April 3, 2014

Today is April 3, just three days after the deadline for Americans to sign up for health insurance under the Affordable Care Act. And a lot has happened in the past six months since the federal and state exchanges opened for business.

It has not always been pretty, but we should take a moment to reflect on what we have accomplished. More than seven million residents of our states have signed up for affordable health care. Millions of people who could not afford health insurance—and were one accident or illness away from financial crisis—now have insurance. This is *significant*. This is something we should all be proud of.

And that's not all. Under the Affordable Care Act, insurance companies are no longer allowed to discriminate against people with cancer, diabetes, or other preexisting conditions. They are no longer allowed to discriminate against women. Millions of our residents receive free preventative care. Millions of kids can stay on their parents' plans until they are 26. And billions of dollars in rebate checks have been sent to consumers across the country.

We must look at the big picture. Millions of Americans are now receiving critical medical care that they could not previously afford. They are our residents, our constituents, and our citizens. This is something they want and desperately need.

To the witnesses here today, and to the state and federal employees who are working tirelessly to implement the law, I want to say thank you on behalf of all of those who now have health care coverage. I know this is an exceptionally busy time for you, and I appreciate that you are taking the time to be here today.

The road we took to get here today was rocky for the federal government. It has also been challenging for some states, including my home state of Maryland. I cannot fully express how frustrated I was with the troubled rollout of the Maryland Health Connection. In my state, as in many of yours, people have a desperate need for quality, affordable healthcare. We needed the system to work. And when it did not, unnecessary obstacles were put in their way, which was completely unacceptable.

But I want to be very clear. The answer to these problems is not to decimate the Affordable Care Act. The solution is not to eliminate healthcare for millions of people, to gut funding for the ACA, or to return to the days when insurance companies could discriminate against us based on our medical conditions. The remedy certainly is not to try to scare people away from enrolling in healthcare they have a right to under the law.

Unfortunately, the House Republicans have voted more than fifty times to repeal, defund, and undermine the Affordable Care Act. Today's hearing is our Committee's 26th on the Affordable Care Act. And not one of the hearings was intended to improve the Act. They were all designed to destroy it.

Despite this vociferous, coordinated, and at times completely misleading attack against the ACA, today more than seven million people have signed up for health insurance. Let me say that again. More than seven million people in this country now have health insurance—not because of Republican efforts, but in spite of them.

Last Saturday, I spoke at a health care enrollment fair at the Baltimore Convention Center where hundreds of people stood in line for hours to sign up for insurance. I was there urging them to tell their friends, families, and neighbors to sign up. And I did it for one simple reason: because health insurance can save their lives.

Where were my Republican colleagues? Have they helped even one of their constituents sign up for health coverage under the law? Have they attended even one rally or forum or event to get the word out in their districts? Imagine the results today if Republicans had focused even half of their efforts on signing up their own constituents instead of relentlessly maligning the ACA.

I ask my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to try something new today. Rather than spending the entire hearing trying to scare people away from the Affordable Care Act, let's turn instead to constructive efforts. Let's focus on finding solutions to the technical challenges some states face. Let's examine what is working well in California and other states, and see if we can use some of those best practices in Maryland and beyond.

The Affordable Care Act is the law. It is working. It is already helping more than seven million Americans. Let's increase that number together and improve the program for all of them.

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