



May 10, 2017

## Health Care in America

On May 4, 2017, the United States House of Representatives voted to pass the American Health Care Act (and thereby repeal most of the Affordable Care Act) by a narrow margin of 217 to 213, sending the bill to the Senate. If this legislation were to become law, it would profoundly affect the delivery of health care in America and the health of most Americans. We all need to learn more about this legislation, which was passed even before the Congressional Budget Office gave it a score to say how much it will cost and how many people will gain or lose access to health insurance. It is clear, however, that many people, perhaps as many as 20 million people, would lose their health insurance that they gained when President Obama signed the legislation that has become known as Obamacare.

What are the main features of the legislation passed by the House? First of all, we must understand that the American Health Care Act (AHCA) would cut four taxes that funded the expansion of health care – this is a bill that cuts taxes for those who are well off. Taxes that would be eliminated include: the 3.8% tax on investment income; the 0.9% tax on individuals with an income higher than \$200,000 or families with an income higher than \$250,000; a fee on health insurance providers firms based on plans; and a 2.3% tax on medical devices. Next, what are the policy changes in the bill? The ACHA would eliminate the individual mandate to purchase health insurance, but it would allow insurance companies to charge people up to 30% more for coverage if they let their insurance lapse for two months. Subsidies to help with paying for insurance would no longer be based on income but would be based on age, with older people getting a little more subsidy. However, it would allow insurers to charge older people up to 5 times more than younger people – the limit now is three times as much. Most analysts don't feel that the proposed subsidies will be enough money to actually pay for insurance that most people need. In addition, in this bill, insurers may be able to place annual and lifetime limits on individual coverage.

Perhaps one of the biggest changes proposed by the ACHA would be in Medicaid. The AHCA would limit the number of people receiving Medicaid that the federal government would support starting just three years from now, and the federal government would give the states only a certain amount of money for each person (a capitated amount). This would greatly decrease the amount of support that states like Illinois receives for people who have Medicaid, and it is likely that many people who have received Medicaid through Obamacare would be cut off of the rolls. This would really set us back on some of the progress that has been made with Medicaid expansion, which has improved access to life-saving medications and services for people who didn't have that access before.

There is a lot more to the bill, but I wanted to write about one more aspect of the legislation. The bill allows states to make many of the decisions regarding how health care is delivered in their state. For example, a state could ask for a waiver from the federal government so insurance companies don't have to offer a full set of benefits in their policies. And, states could ask for a waiver so insurance companies don't have to cover pre-existing conditions. Furthermore, states could impose work requirements on some Medicaid recipients. My point is that states like Illinois have a large role to play in how health care is delivered in their states, and we all have a role in getting to know the issues and in fighting for what every person in Illinois has a right to, and that is the right to true access to quality health care.

With the deadly opioid/heroin crisis and other health-related issues, I think it would be unpatriotic to repeal Obamacare. We must treat Obamacare like we do our Constitution - we must make it better when necessary. The repeal of Obamacare would negatively impact Illinois' human services' budgets and could cause millions of people to be left vulnerable without healthcare. This would set back the gains we have made in health care and possibly force people to use emergency rooms for primary health care. We must work to move forward and improve the health of all of us – the ACHA legislation would move us backward. We can – and must - do better.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LSK Ford', written in a cursive style.

La Shawn K. Ford  
State Representative-Eighth District