



OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Opening Statement of Chair Mark DeSaulnier (CA-11)

Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions

Exploring Pathways to Affordable, Universal Health Coverage

Thursday, February 17, 2022, at 12:00 p.m. | Zoom

Today, we are meeting to explore pathways to help all Americans access high-quality, affordable health care.

Over the past decade, we have made significant progress toward expanding access to health care for Americans. Since President Obama signed the *Affordable Care Act* into law in 2010, more than 20 million Americans secured health coverage, and the uninsured rate has significantly declined. The ACA also ensured that the more than 130 million individuals living with pre-existing conditions cannot be discriminated against or denied coverage.

To expand Americans' access to health care during the pandemic, we passed the American Rescue Plan, which has dramatically helped lower costs for families by:

- Providing enhanced, up-front tax-credits to low-income individuals to lower monthly health care costs,
- Ensuring premium-free access to silver plans, and
- Eliminating the subsidy "cliff" so more low- and moderate-income individuals have access to affordable health care.

During the last Open Enrollment period, a record 14.5 million Americans enrolled in health care coverage through the ACA and State-Based Marketplaces. Simply put, the steps taken in the American Rescue Plan made coverage more attainable for millions – and these reforms have saved lives.

While the U.S. has made progress in terms of coverage over the course of the past decade, millions of Americans remain uninsured or underinsured. This is particularly true for Black, Latino, and low-income Americans who are even more likely to be uninsured compared to their peers.

For more than a decade, some of our colleagues – particularly Republican State Attorneys General – have relentlessly worked to erode or eliminate the ACA entirely.

While I think all open-minded people recognize that we can always improve on legislation and look back at it, these attacks are unacceptable to the American public.

Far too many individuals also continue to be pushed toward low-quality and unregulated "junk" health care plans. The ex-Trump Administration actively promoted these plans, saddling many Americans with piles of debt. And if Americans don't have high-quality coverage, they won't have the care they need.

Unfortunately, 12 of these Republican Attorneys General-led states also have yet to expand eligibility for Medicaid to help low-income individuals afford health care, which has left approximately 2.2 million Americans without insurance.

In comparison to our peers around the world, our health care system is underperforming. According to an analysis by the Kaiser Family Foundation, the U.S. spent around 19 percent of its GDP on health care in 2020, whereas the next-highest comparable country, the United Kingdom, devoted 13 percent of its GDP. The same analysis by the Kaiser Foundation found that health spending per person in the U.S. was almost \$12,000 in 2020, whereas the nearest comparable country, Norway in this case, spent less than \$7,000. We know that these inflated costs are driven, in part, by excessive prices for prescription drugs and other health services.

Not only does the United States underperform on access, but our peer nations also often offer better outcomes and better-quality care according to OECD data.

Our current health care system is broken, and Americans depend on us to fix it.

The lesson we learned from the ACA and the COVID-19 pandemic is that when we invest in expanding quality health care coverage and when we expect providers and insurance companies to perform and produce outcomes of that performance, we save lives. That's why Democrats are committed to ensuring all Americans have affordable, high-quality coverage and I certainly hope that all of us in Congress feel the same way and will join our efforts.

As our witnesses will discuss today, there are many approaches to expanding access to health care, and lots of good ideas about how to get there, such as:

1. Expanding on the *Affordable Care Act*,
2. Establishing a public option, or
3. Transitioning to a single payer "Medicare for All" system.

Each of these options builds on the progress we have made and helps us achieve our shared goal of affordable, high-quality coverage for all.

I really hope that this conversation can also draw upon some of our own experiences back home as well as in our districts. In California, for example, we have taken a number of steps to improve coverage. I'm proud of what we've done in California. I'm proud of being very involved with it as Chair of the California State Senate Budget Committee for Health and Human Services as well as being a member of the policy committee in that body when we implemented the ACA.

I am proud of the success that we have had, and we've had challenges. In Contra Costa County here in the San Francisco Bay Area, we even have our own version of public option—the Contra Costa Health Plan, which I am a proud member of as a county retiree. I can tell you I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for them; they saved my life. This public option competes with commercial insurers and cooperates with commercial insurers, and cooperates with Kaiser, which is a dominant player started here in the East Bay. We have a collaborative effort that keeps prices low and quality high for everyone in this area. I think it is important that we learn from these and other examples as we discuss how best to deliver the quality health coverage that Americans deserve.

I look forward to hearing from our distinguished panel of witnesses and I look forward to a robust conversation with my colleagues where we have legitimate differences of opinion. I really hope we reflect on our experience with pensions in this subcommittee, and I thank Ranking Member Allen and Ranking Member Foxx for their support in those efforts. For all our differences, there's work to be done and I hope we can accomplish real improvements for Americans in health care.

I now yield to the distinguished Ranking Member from Georgia, Mr. Allen.