

Remarks of Ranking Member Bobby Scott
Full Committee Hearing
“Rescuing Americans from the Failed Health Care Law and Advancing Patient-Centered Solutions”
Wednesday, February 1, 2017

Thank you, Chairwoman Foxx. I would like to welcome and introduce the newest Democratic members to the committee.

Congresswoman Carol Shea-Porter represents New Hampshire’s first congressional district and is serving her fourth term in Congress, and I am pleased to welcome her back to the Committee.

Congressman Adriano Espaillat represents New York's thirteenth congressional district. He previously served as a member of the New York State Senate and as a member of the New York State Assembly.

Welcome to the both of you.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses and thank them for their testimony. This is our first hearing in the 115th Congress and this hearing will likely lay out our Committee’s agenda for the coming weeks and months. Unfortunately, this hearing also part of a larger agenda to repeal the Affordable Care Act, root and branch, despite the fact that there is no credible plan to deal with the chaos that this repeal will create.

If my Republican colleagues continue on the course to repeal, we know that thirty million Americans will lose coverage, with the vast majority of those millions in working families. Further, there is no plan to protect the other Americans who have job-based coverage and who now enjoy improved consumer protections and benefits, such as free preventive care. Yes, the cost of health coverage remains a challenge for both employers and workers. But although costs in employer-provided health coverage have gone up, they have gone up much more slowly than before the ACA.

Over seven years we have heard a lot of complaints about the Affordable Care Act, but we have not seen a plan that would make things better. Just last week, our colleagues in the Budget Committee held a hearing where a health care expert from the Urban Institute estimated that if the GOP were to replace the ACA coverage expansion with tax credits at the inadequate levels pushed by HHS Secretary nominee Congressman Tom Price, health care deductibles could skyrocket to \$25,000 for individual and \$50,000 for family plans. Today, we are likely to hear about some of the old, discredited, and highly inadequate ideas around health reform. But there is no strategy or interest in protecting the millions of Americans who now benefit from the ACA.

I’d also once again remind my Republican colleagues of where we were when we passed the ACA. Health care costs were skyrocketing and if you lost your job, or wanted to start a new business and you had a preexisting condition, you were out of luck.

Seniors had no help paying for prescription drugs when they landed in the Part D “donut hole”. Miners suffering from lung disease struggled to get access to health benefits because of complicated requirements that made it almost impossible to prove eligibility.

These are all problems that we fixed – that the ACA fixed. And those solutions disappear if the Republicans succeed in their careless repeal effort.

Despite, Republicans’ nonstop attacks on the ACA, we have made great progress in improving the nation’s health care system. The rate of uninsured and the rate of uninsured children are at an all-time low. The lowest on record.

If the Republicans succeed in repealing the ACA, workers with job-based plans could lose out on the ACA’s consumer protections – such as prohibitions on annual and lifetime limits. They could lose out on access to free preventive services which keeps the American workforce healthier and on the job. These are meaningful protections that have improved the lives of people in this country – protections that the Republicans are threatening to take away.

Another item of importance to both workers and employers is jobs. Repeal could devastate communities across the country, particularly rural areas that already face employment challenges. The American Hospital Association and the Federation of American Hospitals sent a letter to Congressional leaders warning of “massive job losses” if the ACA is repealed. The letter noted the specific threat to rural communities, pointing out that, “hospitals are often the largest employer in many communities.” Estimates show that repeal would result in a loss of 2.6 million jobs across all states; a third of those lost jobs would be in health care though the impact would be felt across industries.

And the collateral damage won’t stop there. Coal miners, who also now benefit from the enhanced protections and benefits provided in the ACA, could lose them.

So we have a few options moving forward. We can choose to move to a single payer system or we can improve upon the ACA. Going back to the days where a pre-existing condition meant you didn’t get insurance, is not an option.

Unfortunately, the conversation around health care has now taken an even more troubling tone. The new Administration has took action to threaten the Marketplace by pulling advertisements for coverage in the final days of the open enrollment period, making no secret about its intention to subvert Marketplace enrollment. Further, President Trump’s immigration executive order runs afoul of American values and our constitution by essentially creating a religious test for entry into the United States and denying due process to green card holders who have been unable to reenter the country. The impact of this order is being felt by communities across the country, and is particularly detrimental to students who wish to pursue their education in the United States. The Association of American Medical Colleges – one of the many physician groups to express concern over the executive order – released a statement explaining that executive order could, “disrupt education and research and have a damaging long-term impact on patients and health care.” I trust that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are as outraged as I am at the

executive order, both because of its lack of humanity and its detrimental impact on the health care sector in this country.

So because this is our first hearing of the Congress, let me be clear about the shared priorities and the vision of the Democrats on this Committee. We are here to strengthen the economic security of working families and to protect the health of this country. There is more that we need to do to improve access and affordability in health coverage, but setting the stage for a repeal vote that will take benefits away from hardworking Americans is irresponsible and morally reprehensible. Similarly, banning the best and brightest talent in the medical community from studying at our universities and practicing medicine in our hospitals is irresponsible and morally reprehensible.

It is my hope that we can refocus our efforts to the financial security of American families, instead of turning the clock backward. Thank you.