



Letter to the Editor

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To the Editor:

While many people are paying attention to the latest breaking news from the White House, we should not forget about our nation's health care situation.

The American Health Care Act (AHCA) of 2017 passed the House of Representatives by only four votes and sits now in the Senate, which is supposedly drafting its own version of a health care bill that would repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act.

Almost every major health care organization, including the American Hospital Association, the American Medical Association, the Children's Hospital Association, the National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems and the AARP, has opposed the legislation.

Additionally, conservative organizations, such as Heritage Action, the Cato Institute, Americans for Prosperity, FreedomWorks and the Tea Party Patriots have all opposed the bill.

Here are six things you need to know about the AHCA as it stands now:

First, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that Social Security expenditures will "decrease by about \$3 billion" in the nine-year period from 2017-2026 due to earlier mortality. Apparently, Rep. Diane Black, chair of the House Budget Committee, is counting on Tennessee's and the nation's death rate to increase to save the federal government some money.

Second, taxes will drop on the roughly top five percent of income earners! Is this a health care law or a tax law?

Third, insurers would be allowed to charge roughly five times more for older enrollees in their 50s and 60s, thereby reducing premiums for younger adults while substantially raising them for older populations. However, states could apply for waivers from the limit. Given how spineless our General Assembly was by not expanding Medicaid via Insure Tennessee, which would have

prevented the unfortunate state our insurance market is in now, they'll have no problem letting older citizens pay more. After all, the sooner they die, the more money Social Security saves. Talk about death panels!

Fourth, states would be allowed to apply for waivers eliminating essential health benefits, thereby weakening protections for people with pre-existing conditions and enabling insurers to charge significantly more if they have one. Republicans love to say their plan will provide "more access" to health care, but they rarely say it'll be "more affordable," because they know it won't be.

Fifth, reduced access to birth control will mean increased expenditures by Medicaid due to the one-year period when funds for Planned Parenthood are prohibited. The CBO estimates that the number of births would increase by several thousand in the Medicaid program, raising direct spending by \$21 million in 2017 and by \$77 million from 2017-2026. And if the federal government caps what it will pay the states for Medicaid, guess what will happen? State taxes will increase, or benefits will be reduced, essentially killing people in the process.

Sixth, insurance companies would be able to place annual and lifetime limits on individual coverage. Tell that to a young mother caring for a child with a brain injury or the organ transplant recipient. Or how about those with chronic illnesses like diabetes, multiple sclerosis or mental illness? Apparently, when you hit those limits, you're supposed to go without medical care or declare bankruptcy.

The Wilson County Democratic Party urges you to contact Tennessee's senators, Bob Corker and Lamar Alexander, and tell them that we expect them to do better than the House. We expect them to come up with a health care plan that is affordable, as well as accessible, that will live up to their president's words: "I am going to take care of everybody. I don't care if it costs me votes or not. Everybody's going to be taken care of much better than they're taken care of now."

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