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## Joplinites join statewide protests against health care plan repeal and replacement

Crystal Thomas Mar 22, 2017 Updated Mar 22, 2017



Globe | Crystal Thomas

A group of protesters holds signs Wednesday outside of U.S. Rep. Billy Long's Joplin office. They protested an upcoming vote repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act.



About 16 protesters in Joplin waved signs and chanted outside of U.S. Rep. Billy Long's office Wednesday morning.

They were there asking Long, a Springfield Republican, to vote against the repeal of the Affordable Care Act, known as Obamacare, and Republican replacement plan called the American Health Care Act.

Seven other "rush hour rallies" around the state will happen Wednesday and Thursday outside the offices of Missouri members of Congress, according to advocacy group Missouri Health Care for All.

Long has voiced support for the replacement plan and has long been vocal about his opposition to the Affordable Care Act. The U.S. House is slated to vote on the AHCA Thursday and can only lose about 20 Republican votes in order to be passed.

Support for the replacement bill has been tepid, especially after the Congressional Budget Office predicted 24 million Americans will lose health insurance by 2026 under the new bill. Criticism of the bill has bipartisan, with some conservatives calling the plan Obamacare 2.0 or Obamacare Lite.

Bob Gideon, of Carterville, protested outside of U.S. Rep. Billy Long's office in Joplin because of his wife. Unlike 67-year-old Gideon, she wasn't old enough to get health insurance through Medicare, nor was she a disabled Vietnam veteran to be able to access care through Veterans Affairs.

She bought insurance through the Affordable Care Act exchange in Missouri. He called it "blessing," especially when she had a six-day stay in the hospital a couple of years ago for small-intestine obstruction. Her health insurance covered what would have been an exorbitant expense, he said.

"If she hadn't had it, I don't know what we would have done," Gideon said.

Gideon said the deductibles in the new plan, especially for some of their age and income level, are too high. His wife needs ongoing checkups so physician's can monitor her health.

"With our income, she wouldn't qualify for the same stuff she gets now," Gideon said.

Mary Plunkett, 61, of Joplin, said all of those at the protest, though they might not participate in the exchanges, help prop up the system by being taxpayers. She said she was concerned that there would be no way to pay for the plan if the mandatory insurance penalty was rolled back, as the replacement plan proposes.

She said "it seems silly" that Republicans would start from scratch, instead of reforming the ACA.

"I think the Affordable Care Act needs to be corrected but I believe as a nation as wealthy as ours, we should have healthcare for everyone," Plunkett, who doesn't identify as Democrat or a Republican, said.

She said she doesn't think their protests would change Long's mind. Rather, she wanted to use her First Amendment right to make her concern known.

"I think most people care about this and show it in different ways," Plunkett said.

This story will be updated later today.

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