

Opening Statement
Chairwoman Anna G. Eshoo
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Health
“Health Care Lifeline: The Affordable Care Act and the COVID-19 Pandemic”
Virtual Hearing
September 23, 2020

We begin our hearing today on a somber note. Earlier this week our country passed the tragic milestone of losing 200,000 of our fellow Americans to COVID-19, and last Friday, America lost the greatest jurist of our time, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg to pancreatic cancer.

These painful losses are why we’re having this hearing today. Millions of Americans are struggling, sick, hungry, and jobless, yet on November 10th the Trump Administration along with Republican Attorneys General will argue before the Supreme Court that it should strike down the entirety of the Affordable Care Act.

If successful, and they may be, 21 million Americans will lose health coverage immediately.

Protections for the 133 million Americans with preexisting health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, and the lasting health conditions caused by COVID-19 which has infected 7 million Americans to date, will be gone.

Two million young adults will lose their ability to stay on their parent’s health insurance until the age of 26.

Approximately 109 million Americans will face lifetime limits on their coverage, keeping them from being able to afford care for expensive illnesses like cancer, hemophilia, and mental health conditions.

The title of today’s hearing calls the Affordable Care Act a “lifeline.” This is the first recession where Americans who lose their job-based health coverage have the lifeline of affordable coverage because of the ACA. A recent study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that for the workers who filed unemployment claims during the pandemic, more than 20 million may be eligible for the ACA’s Medicaid or Marketplace coverage.

Some states, including my home state of California, have embraced the Affordable Care Act’s lifeline and offered special enrollment periods. As we’ll hear from Peter Lee, the CEO of Covered California, the state offered a special enrollment period during the pandemic. Between March 20th and August 31st nearly 290,000 Californians signed up for coverage through the enrollment period.

I’d like to enter into the record a letter I received from AFSCME Council 57 that said, “California’s decision to have a special enrollment period for the ACA has been a game changer

in the lives of those who have lost their health care coverage when they lost their jobs during the pandemic or have been impacted by the wild fires.”

Sadly, the Trump Administration has **not** offered a special enrollment period, keeping Americans from the ACA’s lifeline.

The American Medical Association wrote in a Friend of the Court Briefing that striking down the Affordable Care Act... “at a time when the system is struggling to respond to a pandemic... would be a self-inflicted wound that could take decades to heal.”

I ask my Republican colleagues to avoid these self-inflicted wounds. End your decade-long fight to repeal and weaken the Affordable Care Act. Join us in passing the Heroes Act to shore up Medicaid coverage for nearly 73.5 million Americans across the country and help save the jobs and health coverage of firefighters, police, teachers, hospital workers, and other essential workers across the county.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.