

Pelosi Floor Speech in Opposition of Bill to Repeal of Patients' Rights

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Contact: Nadeam Elshami/Drew Hammill, 202-226-7616

Washington, D.C. – Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi spoke on the House floor today in strong opposition to H.R. 2, the Patients' Rights Repeal Act. Below are the Leader's remarks.

“Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the gentleman for yielding.

“Madam Speaker, today a bill has come to the floor to repeal patients' rights, to put insurance companies back in charge of the health of the American people, and to balloon the deficit.

“Yesterday - in the one and only hearing on this very important bill, the repeal of patient's rights – Democrats heard from Americans benefitting from the health care reform. Nothing speaks more eloquently to the success of health care reform than their own personal stories.

“After hearing from seven of them yesterday, I said: ‘I wish the entire Congress could hear your stories. I wish our Republican colleagues would have had a hearing so they could hear from you the difference this had made in your lives and the difference it is making in the lives of millions of Americans.’ And so I told them that I would share their stories with you.

“First, we heard from a young woman, Vernal Branch, who was diagnosed with breast cancer 15 years ago. The good news is that Vernal survived breast cancer; the not so good news is she has a pre-existing medical condition for the rest of her life.

“As she told us yesterday, the Affordable Care Act changed all that. What she said was, the Affordable Care Act ‘represents protection from the uncertainty and fear that came with being denied health insurance coverage because of my past disease. It represents freedom for my husband and me to make important choices about our lives and our careers...’

“Repeal of the patients' rights that is being proposed today would mean that 129 million Americans under the age 65, like Vernal, would lose their health insurance because they have pre-existing medical conditions.

“Next we heard from a mom, Lori Bresnan. She has a 22-year-old son suffering from celiac disease. Still a student, he was facing the prospect of finishing school and entering the workforce without insurance – but with a pre-existing medical condition.

“Because of the law, Lori said, ‘We are thrilled we have the option to keep him on our insurance in this interim when families so often struggle to keep their kids covered.’

“In a similar vein, Alexander Lataille, a new graduate struggling to find work in this economy even though he has two degrees, one in Atmospheric Science and one Social Science—he wants to be a meteorologist.

“He said that if he lost his ability to stay on his parents’ insurance plan until age 26, he would ‘be faced with a choice, either to pay my student loans or to get health insurance. Actually...I would have little choice in the matter. I would need to pay down my college loans first and go uninsured.’

“Repeal, as being suggested by Republican colleagues, would mean that over 1.2 million young Americans, like Lori’s son and Alexander, would lose their insurance coverage that they receive through their parents’ plans.

“We next heard from Ed Burke, who has testified before. He told me he had testified at the invitation of Speaker Gingrich years ago. For much of his life, Ed Burke has suffered from hemophilia. Two of his brothers do too, three brothers with hemophilia. Though he has health insurance, he has faced the constant worry that his treatments could surpass the plan’s lifetime cap.

“Repealing patients’ rights has a clear impact for Ed: as he said, ‘I will lose the freedom to keep my job if efforts to repeal my protections are successful.’

“Repeal, as is being suggested today, would mean that over 165 million Americans with private insurance coverage, like Ed, would again find themselves subject to lifetime limits on how much insurance companies will spend on their health care.

“Next we heard from a small businesswoman, a doctor. Dr. Odette Cohen is a small business owner from Willingboro, New Jersey. She said she will be better able to afford to give her employees health care coverage because of reform.

“But she also told us a very personal story. It was very powerful, about her two cousins, Rhonda and Roger. Both of them were diagnosed with cancer at the same time. Rhonda worked for a large corporation. She had health care. She had an early intervention, and she received aggressive care and lifegiving care. Roger, however, received only pain treatment in the emergency room. He worked for a small business that didn’t have health insurance, so he couldn’t have that early intervention. Rhonda is alive and well. Roger died.

“As Dr. Cohen said, ‘The choice to work for a small business versus a large company should not be a choice between life and death in the United States. But it was the choice for my cousin.’

“Repeal, as is being suggested today, would mean that more than 4 million small businesses, like Odette’s, Dr. Cohen’s, would lose the opportunity to receive tax credits

to provide health insurance to their employees. As we know, small businesses are the engine of job creation in our country. Odette told us that she wanted to attract the best talent, and she wanted health insurance for them in order to do that. “We next heard from Claudette Therriault. She and her husband Richard are seniors on Medicare. Richard is a diabetic, and his insulin alone costs \$1,000 a month. When Claudette and Richard fell into the donut hole, she said, ‘We had to choose between defaulting on our loan for our home or my husband's health. Well, we chose my husband's health...But changes made are starting to end the donut hole, so families like ours aren't forced to choose between staying healthy and paying the mortgage.’

“Repeal would mean that over 2.7 million Medicare beneficiaries would again fall into the donut hole and Medicare would no longer pay for an annual check-up for 44.1 million seniors.

“One of the most powerful testimonials—I say this as a grandmother, mother and a grandmother—was from Stacie Ritter. Stacie has 12 year old twin daughters, Hannah and Madeleine—well they are 11, almost 12. Can you imagine having these beautiful daughters, Hannah and Madeleine, they are 12 now, when they were 4 years old, they were both diagnosed with cancer—both of them, the twins.

“At 4 years old, diagnosed with leukemia, Hannah and Madeline faced stem cell transplants, chemotherapy, and total body irradiation. But as their mother Stacie said, ‘We were very fortunate at the time. My husband had full coverage through his employer.’ But because of the additional cost of health care, ‘we ended up bankrupt, bankrupt even with full insurance coverage.’ She told us stories about how the insurance company refused to do this that and the other thing.

“But in any event, today, Hannah and Madeline are healthy, happy 12-year olds. But they still have a pre-existing condition. And according to Stacy, and I quote, ‘My children now have protections from insurance discrimination based on their pre-existing cancer condition. They will never have to fear the rescission of their insurance policy if they get sick. They can look forward to lower health insurance costs and preventative care.’

“The repeal suggested today would mean that 17 million American children with a pre-existing medical condition could lose their health insurance because they have pre-existing condition. It would change everything for Hannah and for Madeline. “In Congress, on behalf of these Americans, Democrats have made a firm commitment: that we will judge every proposal that comes to the floor by whether it creates jobs, strengthens the middle class, and reduces the deficit. The repeal of patients’ rights fails on all three counts.

“In fact, consider the cost to our federal budget: according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, repeal would add \$230 billion to the deficit over the next decade.

“Just a little less than one year ago, on this floor, I quoted the late Senator Ted Kennedy—many of us did, our inspiration and all this—calling health care reform ‘the great unfinished business of our society.’

“By completing that great unfinished business of our society, now patients and their

doctors are in charge of their health, not insurance companies.

“Because of the wonderful testimony that we had yesterday—which was representative of what Members of Congress have told the Rules Committee and told our colleagues and told us from our districts across the country—because of their stories of success of this bill, only being enforced for a few months, some of these provisions, most of them only went into effect since September, because of them, because of Hannah and Madeline, because repeal would be devastating to so many Americans, I am pleased to join a broad coalition in opposing it. Every organization from the AARP to UAW, and everything in between: the Catholic Health Association, Easter Seals, and the NAACP.

“I think we should send a strong message today with a great vote against this repeal, which is so harmful to the health of the American people, which is so damaging to our fiscal health as well, and to have people know that we want to have what is best for them. We don’t want them to think that in order for them to have the same kind of access to health care that we do, we should say to them: ‘Run for Congress.’ We want them to have it because Congress has acted upon their needs, their strengths, and the strength of our country.

“So I urge a ‘no’ on the repeal and yield back the balance of my time.”