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Pallone Remarks at Hearing on Proposals to Achieve Universal Health Care Coverage

Washington, D.C. – *Energy and Commerce Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks at a Health Subcommittee hearing on "Proposals to Achieve Universal Health Care Coverage:"*

Since the passage of the Affordable Care Act, more than twenty million Americans have gained the peace of mind that comes from knowing that they and their loved ones have health insurance. This landmark law resulted in the highest insured rate in our nation's history. It also expanded consumer protections so that no matter where you live or work in the United States, your family would have access to affordable, comprehensive health care.

The ACA ended decades of insurance companies price gouging older Americans, charging women more than men, and discriminating against people with pre-existing conditions.   It not only prevented health insurance companies from discriminating against people with pre-existing conditions, it also required insurance companies to cover a set of essential health benefits, like hospitalization, emergency services, maternity care, and substance use disorder services. It also eliminated annual and lifetime limits on coverage that for years had forced people with pre-existing conditions into bankruptcy.

Thanks to the ACA, young Americans can stay on their parent's plans until they turn 26 years old.

The law also expanded Medicaid, which made health insurance available to millions of low-income Americans, including many with serious and chronic pre-existing conditions and unmet medical needs.

Yet millions more would be covered today if it were not for the continued resistance of Republican governors to the law's Medicaid expansion and the repeated attempts by Congressional Republicans and the Trump Administration to undermine and dismantle the law.

House Republicans voted 69 times to repeal the ACA. Luckily, they failed to do so, but they did repeal the law's individual mandate, increasing prices for everyone.

Meanwhile, 20 Republican Attorneys General and Governors sued the federal government, challenging the constitutionality of the law. The Trump Administration has taken the extraordinary position of refusing to defend the law in the courts. If the Republicans are successful in court, it would cause millions of people to lose their health insurance, eliminate protections for people with pre-existing conditions, and immediately spike health care costs for all Americans.

I firmly believe that today we would be very close to universal coverage had it not been for the sabotage and for the refusal of Republican governors to expand Medicaid. I also believe that had the final law included the public option, as supported by the majority of this Committee and the House at the time, that we would be even closer to universal coverage.

Unfortunately, that's not the case and millions of Americans remain uninsured, particularly in states that have refused to expand Medicaid. Also, among the uninsured are undocumented immigrants and their families. When you have more uninsured people, costs go up for everyone. And, under the Trump Administration, the uninsured rate has gone up and American families have lost coverage, including hundreds of thousands of children. We need to enact policies that include all the uninsured.

And that's why we are here today. The bills we are considering reflect Democrats' continued commitment to achieving universal coverage and making health care more affordable and accessible for all Americans. I believe that we must continue to build on the success of the ACA until health care is truly a right for all Americans.

I look forward to the discussion today and I yield back.

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