

Republican Leader Michael C. Burgess, M.D.
Energy & Commerce Health Subcommittee
**“Health Care Lifeline: The Affordable Care Act and the COVID-19
Pandemic”**
Wednesday, September 23, 2020

As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to set the stage by walking through the robust support that Congress has provided already this year to protect American patients during this novel coronavirus pandemic. In various supplemental relief packages, Congress has provided or required coverage for different coronavirus-related services. For example, Congress has required that commercial insurance cover coronavirus testing.

We have also waived all cost sharing requirements for Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program for labs and diagnostic services related to a coronavirus diagnosis. Uninsured individuals are protected because we allowed states the option to pay for these

individuals under Medicaid and established a separate funding stream for provider relief to ensure that physicians, hospitals, and other providers are reimbursed for the care that they provide to uninsured patients. We have provided similar protections for Medicare beneficiaries, in addition to increasing access and reimbursement for telehealth services.

We have championed policies that would keep money in American patients' pockets. We allowed high deductible health plans to cover telehealth under the deductible for two years, and we allowed patients to use funds in Health Savings Accounts and Flexible Spending Accounts for the purchase of over-the-counter medical products, including those needed in quarantine and social distancing, without a prescription from a physician.

You have called this hearing today, in part, to celebrate the Affordable Care Act. If it is so comprehensive and working so

seamlessly, then why have you called us here to discuss how it has struggled to provide adequate protections for individuals during this pandemic? From what I have heard, states and insurance plans have been able to adapt quickly to ensure flexible yet comprehensive coverage for individuals.

My constituents continue to tell me how unaffordable the Affordable Care Act is. Many of those laid off because of the economic impact of the virus are eligible for a special enrollment period to sign up for an ACA plan or have become eligible for Medicaid. If they are choosing not to enroll, that is probably because of the astronomical cost of doing so.

I would like to make it clear that there is vast, bipartisan support for protecting coverage for individuals with pre-existing conditions. Many of us on our side of the aisle have experience with pre-existing conditions in our own families or providing insurance for the employees

of their businesses. If there was a real concern about addressing this issue, the Majority would have voted with Republicans on numerous occasions this Congress to support protections for individuals pre-existing conditions. They also could have called a vote on a severability clause bill to ensure that if the Affordable Care Act were struck down, these protections would stand. They have not taken any of these actions.

The constituents in my district are struggling to afford their health insurance, and I am sure that my district is not the only one suffering from sky-high premiums and deductibles. What good is health care insurance if you are afraid to use it because you can't afford your deductible? This is an issue that I would like to see us tackle.

This hearing is also in direct contrast with the hearing that Chairman Pallone and Chairwoman Eshoo called last December. The hearing notice for the December 19, 2019 hearing stated, "universal

health care coverage has long been the North Star of the Democratic Party.” Their agenda is to pave that road to the North Star – to accomplish one-size-fits-all health care coverage. The reality is that one-size-fits all is really one-size-fits-no one.

It is critical that states maintain the flexibility to address the unique needs of their citizens. Forcing every state and every American to fit into the same box will not work. Americans need and deserve to have choices that will work for themselves and their families. They should not have to worry about spending a substantial portion of their income on health insurance to have an unreasonably high deductible such that they fear using the insurance they pay for.

With that, I yield back.