

United States Senate

January 24, 2020

COMMITTEES
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND
PENSIONS
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL
AFFAIRS
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING
SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

I am writing today to bring your attention to two recent studies highlighting the success of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and to express my strong support for continued investment in the ACA. These new reports highlight the many positive outcomes that have resulted from this law, specifically the gains in coverage for underrepresented populations, due in part to critical protections for individuals with pre-existing conditions. There is still much work to be done to build on the law and further improve affordability of quality coverage and availability of care, but to do this we must not undo the progress we have made.

The link between health insurance coverage and improved health outcomes is indisputable, and such improved outcomes have been some of the ACA's greatest successes. For example, recent research published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Oncology shows that access to health insurance is especially critical in helping reduce racial health disparities. The study examined the racial disparities between insurance status and detection of early stage breast cancer. It found that access to care with adequate coverage led to earlier diagnosis, expedited treatment, and improved prognosis for recovery. This also shows the importance of coverage that is meaningful, with essential benefits and comprehensive care, both key aspects of the ACA. In this same vein, a Commonwealth Fund report published just last week demonstrates how the Affordable Care Act has significantly narrowed racial and ethnic disparities in access to health care. For example, according to the study, the uninsured rate for Latino adults across the country has decreased from 40.2 percent to 24.9 percent over the period the ACA has been in effect, which is of particular importance to a state like Nevada, where over of a quarter of the population is Latino.

As you know, overall, over 20 million previously uninsured Americans have secured health insurance through the ACA, including 12 million individuals who gained coverage through the Medicaid expansion. In Nevada, our uninsured rate was cut in half from 2008 to 2018 – from 22 percent to 11 percent – and the state's Medicaid expansion has been an unqualified success. This is news that should be celebrated across the political spectrum, not challenged in the courts. I have great concern that the ongoing federal lawsuit in opposition to the ACA and supported by this Administration represents a serious threat to the health of millions and the positive health outcomes the law has brought about.

Despite little investment from the Administration and attempts to undermine the law, the ACA continues to function well, with stable insurance exchanges and expanded access to care, even

with changes to the individual mandate. Likewise, the law's prohibition on discrimination against those with pre-existing conditions has helped ensure expanded access to coverage, particularly among diverse populations, as the JAMA and Commonwealth Fund reports demonstrate. With this in mind, I urge you to use your role to pivot away from the goal of ACA repeal, and instead focus on ways we can work in a bipartisan manner to further improve our health care system. My colleagues and I have recently introduced several bipartisan health care bills, including those that focus on rural access to care and investments in telehealth infrastructure, and I invite you to join us in advancing those efforts, not undermining the ACA and its pre-existing condition protections.

Until every Nevadan, and every person in America, has quality, affordable coverage and access to the care they need in a timely fashion, our work will continue. I came to the Senate to help solve problems facing families in our communities in a bipartisan way, and what I hear about the most, despite our successes, is concern about losing health coverage and care. Therefore, while I know there is more to be done, I hope we can take heart in these new reports on the ACA's successes and find common ground that leaves the law and its protections for those with pre-existing conditions as the foundation that we build upon. The communities that we serve deserve no less.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jacky Rosen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "R".

Jacky Rosen
U.S. Senator