

Opening Statement
Chair Diana DeGette
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Energy and Commerce Committee
Hearing on “Sabotage: The Trump Administration’s Attack on Health Care”
October 23, 2019

It’s no secret that the Trump Administration has worked to sabotage health care in this country.

On his very first day in office, President Trump issued an Executive Order directing all federal agencies to dismantle the Affordable Care Act “to the maximum extent by law.” And ever since then, the Trump Administration has worked tirelessly to undermine the ACA and other critical health programs at every turn.

In her role as the Administrator of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Seema Verma has been behind many of this Administration’s efforts to undermine the nation’s health care. Despite her starring role in this effort, today is the first time Administrator Verma has appeared to testify at an oversight hearing in the House, and she has many questions to answer regarding this Administration’s actions.

Since the Affordable Care Act was signed into law, more than 20 million people gained affordable, high-quality health care coverage. But now, under President Trump and Administrator Verma, this Administration is determined to take us back in the wrong direction.

Last year, we saw the number of uninsured people in this country increase for the first time since the ACA was passed. About 1.9 million more people were uninsured last year compared to the year before—including nearly half a million more children. Further, the Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that health insurance premiums are 16 percent higher this year than they would have been if the Trump Administration had not worked to undermine the ACA.

We know the Trump Administration has taken numerous actions to sabotage the ACA.

They are chipping away at critical protections guaranteed by the law. They are allowing states to increase consumers’ costs, reduce their coverage, and undermine protections for those with pre-existing conditions.

They are promoting junk insurance plans that do not provide essential health benefits and leave patients on the hook when they need coverage the most.

They are making it more difficult and more expensive for individuals to find quality coverage on the health insurance marketplace.

And to top it all off, they are rooting for the ACA's collapse by declining to defend the law in the Texas v. United States lawsuit.

We will likely hear today that "Obamacare" is the source of all our problems.

But while the nation's health care law may not be perfect, it's important to understand what would happen if the Trump Administration succeeds in dismantling it entirely:

- 21 million people could lose their health insurance.
- Up to 133 million Americans with pre-existing conditions could be denied coverage or charged higher premiums.
- Those lucky enough to keep their coverage if the ACA is dismantled could once again face lifetime caps on coverage, and could lose coverage for things like prescription drugs and maternity care.
- Women could once again be charged more than men for their health coverage.
- And 60 million seniors and disabled Americans on Medicare will have to pay more for preventive care and prescription drugs.

Yesterday, CMS announced that ACA premiums will drop by about 4 percent next year. This is good news. However, just think about how many more people would be covered and how much lower premiums could be if not for the repeated acts of sabotage at the hands of this Administration. The ACA is succeeding despite the Trump Administration's efforts to tear it down.

Time and time again, this Administration's actions on health care have gone squarely against their duty to promote high-quality health care and the well-being of children and families in need.

Under this Administration, thousands of children and families have lost coverage of basic health services. And this Administration's actions have disproportionately hurt those with disabilities, rural Americans, Veterans, women, and young people of color.

The Trump Administration, and Administrator Verma in particular, have tried to make philosophical arguments for why they are doing these things. But the numbers don't lie.

At a time when we, as a nation, are facing a series of critical health challenges – such as the opioid epidemic and unacceptably high rates of maternal and infant mortality – it is unconscionable that this Administration is working to reverse the progress we've made.

Today, the Trump Administration will have to answer for its unending sabotage of Americans' health care. And Administrator Verma will have to explain to the American people why she – and this Administration – are actively trying to take their health care away.