

Supes vote 4-1 to formally support Obamacare

By Hans Peter, Daily Democrat

May 25, 2017, 3:38 PM PDT

<http://www.dailydemocrat.com/health/20170524/supes-vote-4-1-to-formally-support-obamacare>

Yolo County Supervisors voted to formally support the Affordable Care Act this week in advance of a new federal report that show the Republican version would leave as many as 23 million people uninsured by 2026.

Yolo District 5 Supervisor Duane Chamberlain opposed the action by his colleagues.

“If somebody makes a motion, I’m definitely going to vote against this,” said Chamberlain, even before opening the floor for public comment.

That public hearing marked one of many forums and discussions surrounding the proposed changes to American health care, as the proposed President Donald Trump’s 2018 budget and House bill continues to tinker with over arching plans of repealing the Affordable Care Act, better known as Obamacare.

It’s unlikely the action will affect efforts by Congressional Republicans to rewrite former President Obama’s signature legislation, but officials throughout the state are expressing their opposition anyway.

Generally speaking, Trump and the American Health Care Act would cut billions in federal funding for popular programs such as Medicare and Medicaid while also cutting 20 percent from the Children’s Health Insurance Program and \$7 billion from the National Institute of Health. Moreover, as a candidate, Trump spoke of creating policy that would allow for negotiations with pharmaceutical companies, but his 2018 budget mentions nothing on the subject.

Such federal cuts would undoubtedly weaken state-federal programs designed as safety nets, and would also force state programs to make difficult decisions: spend more of their own money; restrict enrollment; cut benefits, or reduce payments to hospitals and doctors.

On Wednesday, the Congressional Budget Office reported the revised House Republican bill to replace Obamacare would leave 23 million people without health insurance by 2026 and 14 million uninsured in its first year. That estimate for the American Health Care Act is only somewhat better over earlier CBO projections that found 24 million would lose coverage over the next decade.

The legislation would reduce the federal deficit by \$119 billion over 10 years, which is \$32 billion less than the estimated savings for the previous version of the bill. Most of the savings comes from cuts to both Medicaid and tax credits that help purchase individual coverage under the Affordable Care Act.

Individual insurance premiums would increase by an average of 20 percent in 2018 and 5 percent in 2019 under the proposed legislation.

The bill still contains almost \$1 trillion in tax cuts, mainly for the wealthy.

The nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation says the reduction is mainly because the bill delays the repeal of the 0.9 percent payroll tax until 2023. The tax is applied to wages over \$200,000 for an individual and over \$250,000 for married couples.

The change would greatly affect low-income residents, especially seniors. Elders in Yolo County could be paying nearly 75 percent of their annual income on health care premiums, according to a Covered California report released in January.

While supervisors heard no comments from the public during the meeting, the Board has heard many concerns from Yolo residents since Trump implied Obamacare repeals in late January. One such letter to the county's Legislative & Government Affairs subcommittee coaxed supervisors to take an official stance on the topic.

"Ever since the Affordable Care Act came in, my insurance on my workers has tripled in cost, plus it isn't anywhere near the insurance I used to have," Chamberlain said. Chamberlain, a local hay farmer, also said there would need to be some "major changes" in the ACA before he would formally support it. "I'm paying \$10 per hour just for insurance."

Chamberlain voted against the resolution and against the grain of the other supervisors, who said Obamacare — which provided insurance through Medi-Cal and Covered California for roughly 30,000 county residents — improved upon the insurance the county had prior to the Obama Administration.

"Our county budget was severely impacted before the Affordable Care Act," said District 4 Supervisor Jim Provenza. "Medicaid provided significant relief. We were spending a lot of money to provide really inadequate health care to a lot of people."

Provenza went on to explain that before the ACA, insurance neglected the gap of coverage between a clinic check-up a full-blown emergency room trip.

"A lot of people didn't get service until they got into the emergency room," he said. "With medicaid, we have a full continuum of care for thousands of county residents. A loss of that would not only result in a detriment to public health in the county, but would also put us back to a situation where our county budget is severely impacted every year."

Provenza also said cutting back on medicaid would likely force those covered to go back to the extremely expensive and unpredictable cost of relying on emergency services.

District 1 Supervisor Oscar Villegas said he "totally agreed" with how Provenza laid out his concerns.

However, Chamberlain said the "other side of the coin" presents tensions with workers compensation, a system that relies upon claims to determine individual cost. He said he now pays far more for coverage despite a very small number of claims made.

"Where this money is going, I assume, is going to people who don't work and everything" Chamberlain said, "but that's not fair to my workers."

The 4-1 vote put forth by the supervisors follows a trend of support from other California officials. Rep. John Garamendi, D-Third District, released a statement that more or less panned the proposed changes to health care in his region, as well as the rest of California.

“The draconian budget proposal unveiled today by the Trump Administration does not reflect American values,” Garamendi’s statement begins. “It is a cruel departure from the solid, bipartisan approach Congress took in passing the omnibus bill just three weeks ago — a bill that preserved funding for science, supported search for cures, and protected our nation’s most vulnerable people.”