**Will affordable healthcare be available to ALL Americans?**

By Debra Wines

Since the passage of the Affordable Care Act, Republican legislators in the state and on the Federal level have been doing everything they can to repeal the ACA. States were given the opportunity to expand their Medicaid programs to help those who did not meet the qualifications for inclusion in the ACA program. Tennessee legislators refused to accept the funding, leaving over 200,000 of its citizens with no access to affordable health insurance. A large percentage of Tennesseans wanted the Medicaid expansion. Our state assembly, led by Republicans, refused to bring any proposal or bill to the floor for a vote. They chose to ignore their constituents’ needs. They didn’t like the ACA in the first place and they certainly weren’t going to allow the Federal Government to tell them how to manage the medical care of Tennesseans.

When former Governor Bill Haslam ran for re-election, he listened to the people and fed them a crumb of hope. He sent in a proposal, for accepting the expanded Medicaid program, to the Federal Government and they approved it. Bill Haslam was easily re-elected because the Democrats did not have a viable candidate to oppose him. People were hopeful that Governor Haslam would push our state legislators to vote for the Federally approved expansion plan.

Typically, after the election Republicans retained control in both houses of the state assembly. Under Beth Harwell’s leadership, Gov. Haslam’s plan was sent to committees made up of people who could and would slow down any forward progress. Eventually it ended up being basically “dead” in committees dedicated to “investigating” the proposal and implementation. Unfortunately, Gov. Haslam did nothing more to promote the passage of Medicaid Expansion, leaving too many Tennesseans in limbo and without affordable health care coverage.

In Washington, D.C. our state’s Republican Congressmen and Senators continued their multiple attempts to repeal the ACA program. During that time, they were able to remove certain regulations their corporate supporters/sponsors wanted. At the same time, they continued to ignore their desperate constituents by refusing to even meet with them directly, to listen and discuss their concerns.

This has been going on for almost 10 years and Republicans on the state and Federal level still have not been able to come up with a replacement plan for the ACA and Medicaid Expansion program. One of Donald Trump’s major campaign promises was to completely replace the ACA, and give all Americans a better and cheaper healthcare program and negotiate with pharmaceutical companies to reduce the costs of prescription drugs. That hasn’t happened, mainly because Donald Trump admitted he and his “brightest and best people” had no idea healthcare insurance for all Americans was so complicated.

Now, Mr. Trump is facing a re-election campaign and he knows he must do something to make his supporters feel as if he kept his promise. The problem with the “plan” his administration is proposing will not going to make our healthcare system better. It may be less expensive, but it will lessen or remove coverage for millions of Americans.

Most of the serious Democratic Presidential candidates are proposing Medicare for All, or some type of universal healthcare that will provide affordable health insurance coverage for all Americans. Donald Trump and the Republicans are adamant they will not let that happen, mainly because they would lose donors who have very deep pockets, like those in the insurance and pharmaceutical lobby. To hell with the “people” they represent, money is far more important than human beings who need them to do the right thing by adhering to their oath of office.

Into the current fray comes Tennessee’s illustrious Christian outsider, Governor Bill Lee who is proving every day his disregard for the “average” Tennessean. Governor Lee, along with Tennessee Attorney General, Herbert Slatery have signed on to a lawsuit from the Trump administration to abolish the ACA. Again, there is no current plan to replace the ACA. More of our rural hospitals will close, something Gov. Lee has failed to address, even though the majority of people in those rural areas are members of the Republican base who voted for him and Donald Trump. If the ACA is gone, so is reasonably priced health insurance coverage for over 2 million Tennesseans with pre-existing conditions. The number of uninsured Americans will rise to 65%. More than 5 million American seniors will pay more for prescriptions because the Medicare “donut hole” will be opened again. Insurance companies will no longer be required to cover prescription drugs or maternity care. Over 2 million adult children will no longer have coverage under their parent’s policy. More hospitals will be forced to close, and not just in rural areas.

In the meantime, Governor Lee has indicated he will take a serious look at Medicaid State Grants, which when looked at more closely, those grants can still produce a negative financial impact for rural hospital that are struggling to stay open and for many Tennesseans. If there is a recession down the road, those grants may not be enough to provide health care coverage for people who will need it.

One lesson I have learned, since becoming interested in politics, is to keep my eyes open whenever a politician does something outrageous or controversial to distract people from what is really going on. The 2020 election cycle is in full swing and the health care issue is huge, especially for those of us who depend on the availability of affordable and good health insurance. If you are among the rich and can afford out-of-pocket expenses, you’ll be fine with Donald Trump and Bill Lee’s actions. If you are self-employed, a small business owner, farmer or just an average person, the pitfalls of these plans will cause serious problems for you and your family. More and more it appears affordable healthcare for the majority of Americans has become another item to kick down the road, but people’s lives are at stake.