

have pulmonary fibrosis. No, I have never smoked. Not cigarettes. Not anything. Ever. I am simply sick. The feeling of my leg bones splintering, waking me up with the pain, several times a night, several times a week. Each leg is splayed beneath me as if I'd fallen from a window. Of course that's not what happened. This is just what joints and muscles feel like as part of my rare disease.

"The feeling of having a widespread flu-like, bone-crushing ache that does not end. I don't have the flu. I have a rare, autoimmune disease. This is what my entire body feels like 90 percent of the time. The feeling of choking without warning, regularly on coffee. On water. On my own spit. This is what my disease feels like.

"The feelings I'm talking about are what it is like to not be able to take a deep breath, ever, because over 70 percent of my lungs have turned to hardened, stony, scar tissue. The feeling of not even remembering what it is like to take a deep breath.

"Because my particular disease is one that is categorized as autoimmune, it would be several months before we got the correct diagnosis; autoimmunity is notoriously difficult to diagnose.

"And unless you are a specialized medical professional or happen to know someone who is afflicted by rheumatoid disorders, you have likely never heard of what I have: anti-synthetase syndrome—scleroderma. It is rare, progressive, and aggressive. Often it is fatal, especially with the amount of lung damage that I have incurred.

"When after 2 years of chemotherapy, the progression of my pulmonary fibrosis and overall disease process was not successfully remaining stable, I had to go on supplemental oxygen. Within 6 months, I was getting so sick that I eventually had to medically retire at 36 years old; it was a heart-breaking decision.

"I loved my job, and I was good at it. Without the protections afforded to me through the Affordable Care Act, my oxygen, the cost of seeing my numerous specialists, paying for 14 medications, admissions to the hospital, and life-threatening emergency trips to the ER would be nothing short of financially catastrophic for my family.

"A rare disease like mine baffles many doctors. It has not been uncommon for my caretakers to have to spend hours on the phone with insurance companies fighting for a drug that is literally thousands of dollars but necessary for my treatment.

"When you have a rare illness, you often have to try new things. Insurance companies will unabashedly see you as a risk. Why? You are expensive, rare and dying. That is an unholy trinity.

"But since the Affordable Care Act, my medications have been affordable. Access to care is not accessible if you cannot afford it, and what the ACA has done is create a safeguard so that the care that my doctors have prescribed

for one of their sickest patients is truly accessible to that patient because I can afford it.

"I come from a family who has, for generations, always worked and always paid into 'the system.' There are next to no services available for a relatively young woman like me at social services. I know. I've checked. I am not old enough for a full teacher's pension, but do receive a small disability allowance. I receive a small Social Security check, but I am well below the poverty level.

"I need you to understand that people like me are not asking for anything for free. I am willing to continue to pay for the quality health care that I have had. I am willing for there to be changes made to it."

"I find it unconscionable, however, that decisions can be made regarding life and death without actual regard for the felt lives and actual deaths that you will be responsible for if you repeal the ACA.

"I do not know the course that my disease will take. But I have the blood of some powerful ancestors flowing in me, and their fight for life continues in me as well. I am honored to do so in their memory and on behalf of the millions of Americans who do not have the words or the ability to speak for themselves yet are terrified of losing their affordable, solid coverage under the ACA."

Those were her words—and she is not alone in her fear of repeal. Mr. Speaker, I will enter into the RECORD testimony from other women in my district whose lives have been changed by the Affordable Care Act.

Mr. Speaker, we owe it to Mnikesa and everyone like her across the country to protect their health care and to reject this repeal bill.

MICHIGANDERS WILL LOSE COVERAGE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Michigan (Mrs. LAWRENCE) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong opposition to the American Health Care Act.

This week, the Republicans will call for a vote to push 24 million Americans off of their health care and transfer massive healthcare costs on working families across the country.

Today I will take a moment to talk about the impact that TrumpCare will have on my district, the 14th District of Michigan. Under this bill, 70,000 constituents of mine will lose coverage by 2026.

One of the pillars of the existing Affordable Care Act were allowing States like Michigan—who, for the record, has a Republican Governor who worked hard to make sure that we were able to have Medicare expansion so that we could use the Affordable Care Act in Michigan.

One of the pillars of the Affordable Care Act was to expand Medicaid coverage to millions of people. According to the statistics from Healthy Michi-

gan, over 650,000 Michiganders enrolled and gained access to health coverage.

In Oakland and Wayne Counties, which I represent, there are over 140,000 individuals enrolled in Healthy Michigan, the Affordable Care Act. Under the Republican bill, these same Michiganders will lose the coverage that they depend on for their long-term care.

Approximately 200,000 seniors, disabled individuals, children, and women who receive care through traditional Medicaid will be severely impacted by the Republican health plan. That includes half of all the children in Michigan, including over 100,000 children in my district alone.

Republicans are using the repeal-and-replace legislation once again to target women's health by defunding Planned Parenthood. No matter how many times it has been substantiated, it is a fact, it has been stated, the Republicans do not seem to understand or refuse to accept the fact that Federal dollars do not pay for abortions.

Planned Parenthood provides a variety of preventative care, including contraception and cancer screening for millions of Americans and women in this country.

Instead of allowing Planned Parenthood to continue their important mission of providing women across the country with quality health care, Republicans have decided to jeopardize the health of millions of Americans because of a blatantly partisan witch hunt.

I would like to take a minute to share a letter one of my constituents wrote me about her experience with the Affordable Care Act:

"As a self-employed person, the first time in my life I've been able to have health care in Michigan has been through the Affordable Care Act, and I still only very, very rarely go to the doctor.

"But I'm happy to pay into the system every month because I believe that's what it means to be a good citizen: that a healthy community is a safer community, a happier community, and a more creative community.

"Health care is a very important issue to me. My brother has cystic fibrosis, and it is only through Medicaid expansion that he is still able to receive health care.

"The thought of the Medicaid expansion being phased out and my brother being somehow responsible for paying for tens of thousands of dollars per month for necessary medication destroys me."

Mr. Speaker, my constituents deserve better. I urge my colleagues to oppose TrumpCare, the American Health Care Act.

I will stand here and say that the Affordable Care Act is not perfect, but if we really do the job that we are sent here to do as Members of Congress, we would sit down together and fix what is wrong with our existing healthcare

program so that every American will be able to continue to stay on their health care, still be able to allow their children to stay on their health care, and still be able to get health care without being penalized for a pre-existing condition.

Let us work together to make health care affordable for all Americans.

CRITICAL PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. BROWN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BROWN of Maryland. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to oppose the Republican plan to repeal the Affordable Care Act and to address two critical public health issues that are important to the families of Maryland's Fourth Congressional District.

Nearly 26 million Americans are estimated to have chronic kidney disease. 700,000 people, including 3,000 in my district in Prince George's County, have irreversible kidney failure or end-stage renal disease often because of complications of diabetes and high blood pressure, where you cannot survive without a kidney transplant or dialysis treatment. And 70 percent of those patients are on dialysis treatment at least three times per week.

This is a serious issue for us to consider today because nearly 50 percent of all end-stage renal disease patients rely on Medicaid. If we pass the Republican plan to gut Medicaid, we are making life-and-death choices for these patients who are disproportionately seniors, minorities, and some of our most vulnerable neighbors.

I saw the potential impact of these brutal cuts on my constituents when I toured a DaVita Dialysis facility in my district. Nearly half of all people with end-stage renal disease in Prince George's County are being treated at a DaVita facility. There I got to speak to several patients receiving lifesaving treatment, and I heard how important it was for them to have access to dialysis.

Many of these patients simply would not get care if it wasn't for the Medicaid expansion, subsidies to afford quality health coverage, and the consumer protections under the Affordable Care Act that prevent health plans from denying coverage because of pre-existing conditions and prohibiting insurers from dropping people from plans when they become ill. These are real people who will suffer the consequences of our actions if we pass this pay-more-for-less bill.

As Republicans rush to pass this bill to repeal the Affordable Care Act and replace it with more expensive and worse care, we are also turning a blind eye to the impact on the opioid crisis that is ravaging many of our communities. In my district in Anne Arundel County, the number of people killed by heroin and opioid overdoses in 2016 was more than the prior 2 years combined.

□ 1100

Records show there have been more overdoses in the first 3 months of 2017 than all of 2016. And last week alone, over a 24-hour period, there were 16 overdoses and 3 fatalities in Anne Arundel County. The Republican bill offers no solutions for this drug crisis. In fact, it makes it worse by dramatically cutting Medicaid and ending the requirement that addiction services and treatment be covered by States.

Because of the Affordable Care Act, 1.3 million people are receiving treatment for substance abuse disorders or mental illnesses under Medicaid expansion. In Maryland, Medicaid pays for nearly 40 percent of all addiction treatment medication.

Without this expansion, the clear majority of those people would either fall into the treatment gap, unable to receive substance abuse treatment because of a lack of insurance or public funds, or be forced to wait months or years to get into publicly-funded treatment programs.

The so-called flexibility Congressional Republicans want to give States would only mean less funding for substance abuse. This is a step in the wrong direction, at a time when we are facing this urgent public health crisis.

Reducing access to addiction treatment would lead to more drug overdose deaths and more trips to our emergency rooms. We know that untreated addiction leads to more crime and more homelessness. Again, I worry that the proposals being offered in this House could cost the lives of thousands of people in my State and around the country.

The GOP plan for repeal will hurt a lot of people: the 24 million Americans who will be uninsured; the millions of middle-income families, especially the elderly, who will pay thousands of dollars more for care; the 33 million children and 10 million people with disabilities impacted by Medicaid cuts; the 390,000 women who will lose care if Planned Parenthood is defunded.

But these aren't just numbers in a CBO report, they are the dialysis patient in Upper Marlboro, or the family whose son is finally getting the addiction treatment he needs in Severna Park.

Mr. Speaker, let us think about all of these families before we vote on this ill-conceived and ill-advised bill. Let's not put partisanship before patients.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 11 o'clock and 2 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at noon.

PRAYER

Pastor Chris Bell, 3 Circle Church, Fairhope, Alabama, offered the following prayer:

Our Lord and Father, I come to You today in this place of government of the Nation that I love to ask for Your hand of blessing and guiding wisdom upon the leadership of these United States of America.

We know that all good gifts come from Your hand, and this beautiful and free Nation in which we live is one of those gifts.

We thank You today for the many ways that You have blessed us, from our bountiful natural resources to our freedom to work and to speak and to worship.

And it is because of these blessings that You have also given us a great responsibility to our world to live and to lead by example.

So, by Your grace today, I humbly ask that You would help these leaders of our Nation and our citizens to be a continued light in the darkness.

We confess now our need for Your help and Your guidance. Please place Your mighty hand on us today, for You have told us in Your Word to trust not in our own understanding, but to trust You and acknowledge You in all of our ways and You would make our path straight. May we do this today and in the future.

It is in the name of our Lord, Jesus, I pray.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER. Will the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. BYRNE) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. BYRNE led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

WELCOMING PASTOR CHRIS BELL

The SPEAKER. Without objection, the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. BYRNE) is recognized for 1 minute.

There was no objection.

Mr. BYRNE. Mr. Speaker, it is written in Philippians 4:6:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

As this body debates important issues, it is critical we begin with prayer. I am honored my constituent Pastor Chris Bell was able to lead today's prayer.