

Office of the Governor
State of Louisiana

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GOVERNOR



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March 14, 2017

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
H-232, The Capitol
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
House Minority Leader
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker, Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer and Leader Pelosi:

First, I would like to thank you for your support of Louisiana's ongoing disaster relief efforts following two historic floods in 2016. The assistance provided by Congress will be a tremendous help to the nearly 200,000 families whose lives were turned upside down by these disasters.

Today, I write to you to voice my serious concern with the *American Health Care Act*, in particular, its impact on Medicaid expansion. I understand that the issue of health care reform brings sharp divisions across the country and that there are strong opinions about how to best provide quality, affordable health care to our citizens. I will be the first to recognize that the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA), also known as Obamacare, is not perfect, and that we can make significant, meaningful changes to the law without unnecessarily harming the people of this country whose lives and well-being are in the balance. Many of the faults exist because the bill was rushed through the process without the appropriate vetting, and from my vantage point, we are at risk of making that mistake again. I implore you to take a deliberative and bipartisan approach to changing this law – soliciting the necessary input from experts like the Congressional Budget Office on the bill's cost and impact on coverage for millions of Americans.

Of particular interest to me and the people of Louisiana, is the possible elimination of Medicaid expansion in 2020, or sooner. Simply put, Medicaid expansion in Louisiana has been a success. Whether we discuss the health of our citizens or the economic impact, the evidence is clear that Medicaid expansion is the right choice for Louisiana. I have no doubt that I speak for

the vast majority of the 31 governors who have expanded the program when I say that eliminating expansion coverage would have severe consequences on the lives of our constituents and our state budgets.

Today, more than 405,000 working people in Louisiana have access to health care through Medicaid expansion, many for the first time in their lives. This access is changing, and in many cases, saving their lives. The numbers speak for themselves. Since July 2016, more than 62,000 patients have received preventive care treatments, 5,700 women have been screened for breast cancer with 74 women having been diagnosed and now receiving treatment thanks to Medicaid expansion. To date, nearly 5,900 patients have been screened for colon cancer with 1,700 patients having pre-cancerous polyps removed and 64 patients being diagnosed with cancer, and more than 1,300 patients have been diagnosed with diabetes that they didn't know they had before we expanded Medicaid.¹ Moreover, nearly 14,000 Louisianans have sought treatment for substance use through the expansion, receiving services ranging from medication-assisted therapies to both outpatient and inpatient treatment. Overall, Louisiana's uninsured rate has dropped from 22 percent in 2013 to 12.5 percent in 2016, leading to our state having one of the greatest drops in the uninsured rate in the country².

Medicaid expansion has also been a benefit to the state budget. Upon taking office last year, I inherited a \$2 billion budget deficit from my predecessor, a record high for our state. In the first year alone, the state of Louisiana is saving nearly \$200 million because of expansion. As the program currently exists, our state is projected to save more than \$1.3 billion over the next five years. These savings will allow us to make critical investments in our state's future by supporting critical health care services, education and our state's flagship scholarship program – the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS).

Finally, Medicaid expansion is helping our economy. Jobs in the health care sector in Louisiana are at an all-time high, and it is estimated that \$1.8 billion in increased economic activity will result from expansion. For an energy state struggling with low oil prices, Medicaid expansion is not just a critical source of care for our workers, but a needed source of jobs. Eliminating Medicaid expansion will reverse these gains and put a drag on our economy. If you were to speak to health care leaders from our state, you will hear many say they are seeing the number of uninsured patients that come into their facilities decline dramatically. That is a goal that we all share, and the proof is there.

There is an opportunity to get this right. Already, congressional leaders in both parties are signaling their opposition to the recently released legislation because it eliminates the

¹ Louisiana Department of Health, Healthy Louisiana Dashboard (<http://www.ldh.la.gov/HealthyLaDashboard/>)

² Baton Rouge Business Report: [Share of uninsured Louisianans fell to 12.5% last year](#)

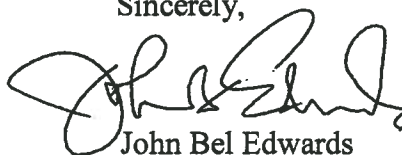
Medicaid expansion.³ Of all the problems that exist with the ACA, Medicaid expansion is not one of them. As I have long said, this is not a left versus right issue. This is a right versus wrong issue, and the people of Louisiana, and across this country, especially our most vulnerable working citizens, deserve nothing but the best from all of us. That includes setting aside partisan politics to make lasting, meaningful reforms to the health care industry that will preserve access and quality of care.

I am also concerned that the *American Health Care Act* shifts Medicaid to a “per capita cap” funding system, which would impact care for children, people with disabilities and especially seniors. Caps do not contemplate new treatments for complex medical conditions, nor the growing cost of care for seniors as life expectancy continues to rise. According to outside analysis, caps would reduce health care funding to states over time. Shifting costs on to the states is not just bad for state budgets, but will negatively impact access to care and reverse recent gains in health insurance coverage. I strongly believe that rationing is not the right approach for our country.

As you continue this debate, I look forward to being a partner with you because Louisiana should serve as a national model for improving efficiencies and access to care. Louisiana has created a “dashboard” that provides real-time enrollment information and statistics to highlight the success of this program. I encourage you to visit it at www.ldh.la.gov/healthyladashboard.

Our shared goals of protecting taxpayers and securing a robust health care system is possible, but we must be willing to work together. In that vein, please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of assistance.

Sincerely,



John Bel Edwards

Governor

cc: Louisiana Congressional Delegation
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
U.S. Senate Committee on Finance
U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House Committee on the Budget

³ POLITICO: [4 GOP senators demand to keep Obamacare Medicaid expansion](#)