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U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader – who represents Oregon's 5th Congressional District, including most of Clackamas County and part of Multnomah County – participates in a 27-hour debate of the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee on the American Health Care Act.

'It undermines the fabric of our country'

Congressman Kurt Schrader doesn't mince words about his stance on the GOP health care bill

BY JOANNE ZUHL
STAFF WRITER

After a grueling 27-hour debate, the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee, chaired by Oregon's Rep. Greg Walden, voted March 9 to advance the GOP health care plan. The vote was party-line, with the Republican Walden praising the bill for its "affordable, patient-centered reforms," with "greater flexibility, lower costs for families and greater choice for patients."

His fellow representative from Oregon, Democrat Rep. Kurt Schrader, was also in that marathon committee meeting, and his description of the American Health Care Act is less flattering.

"Misguided," "backward" and even "dark ages" are the words he uses to describe the proposal Republicans have served up to replace the 2010 Affordable Care Act.

The GOP's proposal repeals the individual mandate/tax penalty incentive for having minimum insurance coverage and caps the amount of Medicaid funding provided to states annually. It jeopardizes already fragile funding for mental health care and directly cuts women's health services. And it repeals funding for the Prevention and Public Health Fund, among many other changes.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office reports that the plan would result in 24 million more people without insurance by 2020 than under the current plan. The House

Republicans insisted on voting the proposal out of the committee before the CBO released its report.

But even with Republican control in the White House, House and Senate, the GOP plan isn't set in stone. Schrader said he and others are leading the charge to re-craft the proposal to fix existing problems inherent within the current Affordable Care Act, but not to gut the system, as some GOP members have suggested they do.

"We have a lot of options left to showcase what is wrong with this thing and why it undermines the fabric of our country just when we thought we were starting to be a country where health care was a right and not a privilege," Schrader said.

At recent town hall meetings and online, Schrader has asked people who are worried about health care and other issues to tell him their story. We asked what he was hearing.

Kurt Schrader: I had a constituent the other day whose baby was determined to have some developmental issues before he was born, and he would never have had health care, they would never have been able to get this

child covered, and thanks to the Affordable Care Act, their son is doing very, very well. He's coming along and getting the treatment and the therapy that he needs. And he would never have had that.

There are tons of issues, the cancer treatments that would have been totally unaffordable, the diabetic management issues that people wouldn't have had, or gotten the right counseling for.

In Oregon, as a result of the Medicaid expansion in particular, coordinated care organizations are actually able to put some money aside to take care of some of the social determinants that lead to bad health. In other words, they're able to follow up with their patients and make sure they're taking their medication, either by phone or going to their home.

They're able to make sure their patients can go to the grocery store, that they see their doctor. And frankly, in some cases, make sure that there's housing for some of the very-low-income people. Because, as we all know, you can have all the greatest treatment in the world, but when you're just

"We've had some huge town halls, a thousand people in Salem, 600-plus in Milwaukie, a few hundred in Woodburn, and they're all terrified of losing this access (to health care). The stories and the fear – the fear is palpable."

U.S. REP. KURT SCHRADER

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