

Community Forum

Seize the moment

The Congressional Budget Office weighed in Monday on the profound impact of the House Republicans' ambitious Obamacare fix. There's fuel here for both proponents and critics of the bill known as the American Health Care Act.

CBO says 24 million fewer Americans would have health insurance by 2026. Why? Some would choose not to have insurance because the bill ends the mandate that people buy insurance or pay a penalty. Others would forgo insurance because of rising premiums. And many would lose coverage because of dramatic changes to Medicaid.

The overall effect: Americans approaching Medicare coverage at age 65 would pay more and younger Americans less, the CBO says.

At the same time, the bill would reduce the federal deficit by \$337 billion by 2026 — because of less government spending.

Those are, again, CBO estimates. They aren't the final word on whether

the current GOP plan would succeed or fail.

Now, the big question: What do House Republicans do? Will these — should these — estimates compel GOP leaders to change the bill?

They should be open to retooling their bill to encourage more people to buy coverage. The

urgency here comes not from the tenets of the bill itself but from a much bigger problem: Obamacare is floundering and risks collapse.

We're sure that opponents — Democrats and conservative Republicans among them — will marshal these CBO numbers as reasons to scuttle this bill or, conversely, to have it destroy all things Obamacare. Democrats have defended the current law and reject repeal. Conservatives criticize this bill as "Obamacare Lite," replacing one entitlement with another; those lawmakers seek a full Obamacare eradication, including popular features that allow children to remain on parents' policies

until age 26 and forbid insurers from denying coverage for pre-existing conditions. That won't and shouldn't happen.

President Donald Trump, House Speaker Paul Ryan and other GOP leaders can remind Americans that they seek to replace Obamacare not because it is the signature achievement of a Democratic president but because it is imploding. Insurers are abandoning markets. Premiums are rocketing. Coverage plans are narrowing. Healthy young people are avoiding Obamacare policies and sicker people are flocking to them. At some point, Obamacare risks plunging into what insurance experts call a "death spiral."

So the next chapter begins: What might an improved bill include?

The GOP plan currently offers some Americans less generous subsidies but would bring market-based reforms that could encourage more Americans to buy insurance. Building in more incentives for younger, healthier people to buy policies simpler than Obamacare's wouldn't only leave more Americans

insured. It would lower premiums.

Are there other ways to whittle back the estimated number of people who lose coverage? Yes, probably by adjusting the Medicaid provisions.

If this CBO report propels Democrats who want to preserve today's Medicaid and Republicans who want fewer mandates to the same conference table to hash out a better plan, great.

But remember that if Washington fiddles, Obamacare may burn. "The time is now," Ryan says of Obamacare repair. "This is the moment."

Yes, it is. The CBO just made the Republican task more complicated, but also possibly more clear: Americans need health coverage that is flexible, that they can afford and that includes the doctors and hospitals they want.

GOP leaders may have hoped their plan would float to President Trump's desk as a fait accompli. It won't. Time for Republican leaders to respond and retool.

This editorial originally appeared in the Chicago Tribune on March 14.

Letters to the editor

Inside your county government

Severe Storms Awareness Week: Preparing for weather emergencies

March 20 marks the beginning of spring and Maryland Severe Storms Awareness Week. In support of this important week, the Department of Emergency Services would like to remind you to prepare before emergencies happen.

During the spring season, Charles County is at risk for flooding, damaging winds, tornadoes, hail and lightning. These hazards typically occur in our county every year. Equip your family for emergencies by creating an emergency kit. Emergency kits are important in your home and car, as you never know when disaster may strike. Assemble your kit before an emergency, as you may need to evacuate at a moment's notice and take essentials with you.

Basic emergency kits should include water, one gallon per person per day for at least 72 hours; food for at least 72 hours; battery-powered or hand crank radio; flashlight and extra batteries; first aid kit; whistle to signal for help; dust mask to help filter contaminated air; plastic sheeting and duct tape to shelter-in-place; moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties for personal sanitation; wrench; can opener; and local maps.

Make an emergency plan for your family. Your family may not be together when a disaster strikes, which makes it vital to think about how you will communicate. Consider having a meeting place in case you are separated, and write down contact and medical information. To download a free plan, visit www.ready.gov/make-a-plan.

Become familiar with severe weather types and terminology. Two important terms are watches versus warnings. A watch means the storm may occur. A warning means the storm is near and will hit soon, and you should take cover. If a severe thunderstorm warning is issued or you are experiencing strong winds, get to a sturdy shelter and stay indoors away from windows. If there is a tornado warning or you see a tornado, quickly get inside and go to the lowest floor possible. Tornadoes can form rapidly in the right conditions.

Be vigilant to your surroundings, especially when driving. During flooding, never enter an area where water is flowing over a road and you cannot see the pavement. Turn around; don't drown! If you are outside and hear thunder, you are close enough to be struck from a fringe lightning strike. More than 98 percent of lightning casualties are from people outdoors — get indoors or inside your vehicle if possible.

Always check the weather report before you head out the door. If you would like to receive severe weather notifications by text, phone, or email, sign up for our Citizen Notification System. You can select the types of notifications you wish to receive and how you receive them. Visit www.CharlesCountyMD.gov/CNS to register.

Take the time to teach your family how to prepare for weather. Visit www.ready.gov for a complete list of severe storms and preparedness information for adults and children. Stay safe and happy spring.

William Stephens is the director of the Department of Emergency Services.

State reps should stay out of WCD talk

I'm writing to voice my concern about three members of the Charles County State Delegation, Del. Edith Patterson (D), Del. Sally Jameson (D) and Sen. Thomas "Mac" Middleton (D), taking sides in a local, Charles County, land use/zoning issue that is part of the County's new Comprehensive Plan.

Speaking at the Charles County Chamber of Commerce legislative breakfast, the three all expressed opposition to the proposed Watershed Conservation District, which is an issue they have no business commenting publicly on. If they want to get involved in such local issues, then they should run for local office.

Joseph H. Selden III, La Plata

Thanks for such dedication to our troops

For more than 10 years, the Waldorf Jaycees have supported our military troops at the Joint Base Andrews hospital in an area called the Maryland Room. Here soldiers from every branch of the military service return from battlefields such as Iraq and Afghanistan, and transition through the hospital to get medical evaluation, medicine and their injuries treated, before returning to their U.S.A. home bases.

These men and women arrive mostly in their field uniforms with little baggage or comfortable clothing to make their overnight — or longer — stay comfortable. The Jaycees have purchased and given them civilian clothing, phone cards to call their families, DVD movies, sodas, candy, juice,

toiletries and whatever is needed to make their stay as comfortable as possible.

The Maryland Room is a lounge room furnished with a big screen television, kitchen, dining area, computer stations and an Xbox game station. This room is furnished with eight reclining chairs that have been in the room for over 12 years and were showing much wear and tear, and needed replacing.

The Jaycees approached the HH Gregg Waldorf store and partnered with them to purchase and donate the very much needed recliners, a TV cabinet and side chairs. What would have normally been an above-budget cost was possible because HH Gregg most generously cut the cost for the new furnishings

more than half.

We are very grateful to these organizations and others like the Waldorf UTZ Distribution Company who have also been donating chips and snacks to these troops for many years.

Thanks to their generosity and support, our military personnel find personal comfort and much-needed rest and relaxation after their combat duty.

Thank you Waldorf Jaycees, HH Gregg and UTZ for your service and support to your country. You have honored our community, and especially our military men and women, who sacrificed their lives in battle for our freedom and safety.

Carol Kern, Waldorf
The writer is a volunteer with the American Red Cross.

We support the library and its director

As the trustees of the Charles County Public Library, appointed by the Charles County Commissioners, we have an obligation to ensure the proper delivery of library and informational services to the benefit of Charles County residents. Janet Salazar, the library's executive director, recently wrote a wonderful letter articulating the library's mission. We fully stand by Ms. Salazar and her staff as they carry out their mission to serve our community. As a library, we will continue to ensure that our community can learn about and discuss important subjects, no matter how controversial they may be.

Claudia Bellony-Atanga, La Plata
The writer is a member of the Charles County Public Library Board of Trustees.

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