

With the beginning of a new year, we face a new set of challenges and changes upon us. However, the Senate Republicans on Day 1 of the 115th Congress voting to dismantle the *Affordable Care Act* should not be one of them.

In the 1960s, President Lyndon Johnson introduced the nation to *The Great Society*. This was our government's effort to tackle poverty, racial injustice, education, medical care, urban problems, rural poverty, and transportation. Fifty years later, President Barack Obama continued the mission of *The Great Society* with the introduction of the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA), which connected millions of uninsured Americans with the resources needed for medical care and treatment. Some of those uninsured included the LGBTQ community.

How does the dismantling of the ACA affect the LGBTQ community?

Beyond the loss of access to routine and emergency medical care for all members of the LGBTQ community - such as wellness visits, emergency room treatment, mammograms, hospitalizations and the like - there are other concerns. When it comes to HIV/AIDS, for example, insurance is vital. We have already seen the loss of funding for Rhode Island's ENCORE Needle Exchange program, which gave counseling and protection to adults 18 and older, and provided outreach workers for anonymous HIV testing, referrals to drug treatment, medical care, social services, clothing and personal hygiene items to those in need. Eliminating services and treatment under the ACA will only compound the loss of that \$68,000 program in cutting the incidence and severity of new infections in our state.

Now, let's look at the Ryan White HIV/AIDS program providing HIV-related services in our country for those coping with the HIV disease. I am not confident in any potential increase in funding in this new administration, considering Vice President-elect Pence's first campaign for Congress said money to help those with HIV/AIDS should go to organizations "which provide assistance to those seeking to change their sexual behavior." The ACA helps people living with HIV/AIDS by ensuring coverage for those with pre-existing conditions, expanding Medicaid coverage, lowering prescription drug costs for those on Medicare, and providing essential health benefits.

And then there are the expected, serious impacts upon the transgendered community. The process of transitioning is not an easy one: it requires extensive medical and behavioral health care to folks already facing much discrimination in the health care system. Many of those in the transgendered community do not have health insurance and rely on ACA to get the help they need for these treatments. Taking away resources to those struggling to live their true lives is not only disgraceful, it puts their bodies and minds at peril, too.

These are just a few examples of the vital services and resources the Affordable Care Act provides to not to just the LGBT community, but the community as a whole. So, before Republicans throw out the proverbial baby out with the bath water, maybe they should reflect on the real reason they were sent to Washington - to work every day in making the lives of ALL Americans better. And, if that doesn't help motivate them, there's the simple reminder that midterm elections are only 2 short years away.

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