

Editorial

Defunding Women's Health Care

The numbers are in and they don't paint a pretty picture. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office reported Monday that under the Republican plan to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, 14 million Americans would lose health care coverage next year. By 2026, an additional 10 million would lose coverage.

Even before these grim numbers were revealed, the adverse effects that the plan would have on access to health care by lower-income women were pretty obvious. That's because the legislation includes a provision to cut off funding to Planned Parenthood.

GOP lawmakers have tried for years to defund Planned Parenthood because abortions are performed at some of the organization's clinics. Federal funds are not used for these abortions, but Medicaid does reimburse the clinics for other services provided to low-income patients, such as cancer screenings, sexually transmitted disease testing and treatment and family planning.

So, the end result of preventing federal funds in any form from going to Planned Parenthood would be to deny critical health services to lower-income women. Anti-abortion advocates insist that these services can be attained at other health care facilities, but the truth of the matter is that no other provider of these kinds of services has the infrastructure in place to reach as many lower-income women.

Planned Parenthood has 650 health centers throughout the United States, half of which are located in medically underserved areas. In the most recent year

for which statistics are available, these centers provided services to 2.5 million people. Services rendered included 270,000 Pap tests, 360,000 breast examinations and 4.2 million tests and treatments for STDs, including more than 650,000 HIV tests.

Planned Parenthood's sex education programs reach 1.5 million young people each year, greatly contributing to what is a 40-year low in teen pregnancies. It's estimated that contraceptive services provided by Planned Parenthood's clinics helped avert 578,681 unintended pregnancies in the most recent year cited.

In fact, only 3 percent of what Planned Parenthood does is related to abortion services. It follows that 97 percent goes for other services, including 34 percent for contraception and 42 percent for STD testing and treatment.

Cutting off funding for Planned Parenthood would lead to a higher number of unwanted pregnancies and abortions because contraception would not be as widely available as it is now. Family planning is and should be a key component of health care.

We understand the worries of the women who held a rally in downtown Lexington March 3 that called attention to Del. Ben Cline's sponsorship of a



SUPPORTERS of Planned Parenthood took part in a women's rights rally March 4 in downtown Lexington outside the office of Del. Ben Cline, who sponsored a bill to withhold state funding from the organization. (Stephanie Mikels Blevins photo)

bill during the most recent session of the General Assembly that would have defunded Planned Parenthood at the state level. Withholding funds from Planned Parenthood at the state or federal level won't stop abortions but will imperil health care for lower-income women.

We were especially encouraged by the wisdom shown by the high school students who organized and participated in the rally. These young women see clearly the connection between funding for Planned Parenthood and the availability of much-needed health services.

It is our hope that enough members of Congress see this

connection too so that the provision to defund Planned Parenthood is deleted from the health care legislation being considered. We suggest that the architects of the GOP health care plan go back to the drawing board and figure out a way to improve, not gut, the ACA. Holding down costs and extending coverage to as many Americans as possible should be the twin objectives of any attempt to reform our health care system.

At the very least, any attempt at reform should seek to expand, not reduce, access to vital health care services for lower-income women.

OUT OF THE PAST

75 Years Ago

March 12, 1942

All local merchants and business owners, as well as householders, are forbidden to keep lights burning at night unless someone is present to immediately turn them off in case of a blackout. Also, a practice blackout has been set for March 20 at 8 p.m. The signal for the blackout will be a two-minute blowing of the fire siren in varying pitch.

Nearly \$110,000 was spent on the secondary road system in Rockbridge last year. Most of the road system, consisting of 564.91 miles of road, is now hard paved and in excellent condition. There is no such thing as getting stuck in the mud in Rockbridge, according to a report by the resident engineer.

50 Years Ago

March 15, 1967

The Board of Supervisors keeps the same tax rate as last year but cuts the school budget by \$50,000. In an unprecedented move, the supervisors also determine the specific cuts to be made in school spending.

Rockbridge County is in the district of the new Dabney S. Lancaster Community College in Clifton Forge.