



July 24, 2017

Dear Senator,

I write on behalf of nearly 200,000 members of the National Farmers Union (NFU) who are engaged in all forms of family farming and ranching. NFU's member-driven policy "affirms the right of all Americans to have access to affordable, quality health care." Unfortunately, the repeated attempts to reform our health care system have not taken into account the needs of farmers, ranchers and rural Americans. Both the Better Care Reconciliation Act (BCRA) and Obamacare Repeal Reconciliation Act (ORRA) would limit access, increase costs, and lower the quality of health care coverage for family farmers and ranchers. We urge you to vote no on both bills in any form.

The cost of health care has long been a primary concern of farmers and ranchers. American farmers are much older, endure higher levels of stress, and are more injury-prone than workers in other industries. A recent USDA-funded study found that nearly three out of four farmers and ranchers report health insurance is an important risk management strategy for their operation. Without affordable access to quality coverage, farmers' and ranchers' personal health will be at risk, and so will the financial viability of their operations.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) was a step in the right direction. Income-based tax credits and premium subsidies help farmers maintain consistent coverage, especially during downturns in the farm economy. The expansion of Medicaid has proven beneficial to rural communities where the rate of enrollment is higher than in urban America. Yet, our current health care system is not without its problems. Many farmers and ranchers continue to face high premiums, and the Health Insurance Marketplace needs stabilization. However, the BCRA would leave many rural Marketplaces without a single insurer. Worse yet, completely repealing the ACA would leave nearly three-quarters of the population without a single insurer in the non-group market.

Two-thirds of farmers and ranchers report having a pre-existing condition. The ACA's protections for individuals with preexisting conditions are extremely important to farmers and ranchers and enabled many to access health insurance for the first time. Eliminating those protections or granting states waivers for annual and lifetime limits would leave many farmers and ranchers without coverage in times of extreme need.

Any cap to Medicaid would have devastating consequences for rural communities, where enrollment is higher than in urban areas. Rural hospitals are more dependent on Medicaid payments than their urban counterparts. The correlation between a strong Medicaid program and the success of rural hospitals has become evident over the last six years. Over 80% of the seventy-nine hospitals that have closed in that time are located in states that opted out of the Medicaid expansion. With another 673 hospitals at risk of closure, Congress needs to increase, not decrease support to rural hospitals.

Allowing insurance companies to charge older customers five times as much as younger customers is particularly troublesome for farmers, who average 58 years of age. Any decrease in tax credits would further disadvantage older farmers and ranchers, making health care unaffordable for many. At the same time, eliminating subsidies for out-of-pocket costs would make deductibles too costly for many young and beginning farmers. Repealing the ACA's tax credits and premium subsidies would serve as a barrier to entry for the next generation of farmers and would put existing operations at risk.

Affordable access to quality health coverage is a high priority for all Americans. While there is certainly room for improvements to current policy, the Better Care Reconciliation Act and the Obamacare Repeal Reconciliation Act both ignore the needs of family farmers and ranchers. NFU urges you to vote no on either piece of legislation and to seek a common sense, bipartisan solution to improve our nation's health care system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roger Johnson".

Roger Johnson
President