

Millions insured thanks to ACA

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Ten million Americans have gained health insurance coverage as a result of the Affordable Care Act, including over 50,000 Nevadans who've obtained coverage through our state's health insurance marketplace and Medicaid expansion during the last three months of 2013.

Despite the rocky rollout of the health insurance exchanges and unrelenting Republican attempts to sabotage the ACA's implementation, 2.1 million people signed up for private insurance through the exchanges and about 4.4 million people have gained coverage through states participating in the Medicaid expansion over the past three months.

Over the past couple of years, another 3.1 million young adults have gained coverage through the health law's rule forcing insurers to cover dependents up to the age of 26.

These figures are well below enrollment targets set by the Obama Administration after the ACA was signed into law in 2010. Nonetheless, millions of Americans now enjoy the security of health insurance with an even larger spike in coverage expected to come later this spring as private plan enrollment and Medicaid caseloads accelerate.

In spite of these gains, there is no indication that Republican efforts to undermine Obamacare have run their course. Indeed, Sharon Angle's recently filed initiative petition to outlaw health insurance exchanges in Nevada and an aggressive anti-ACA television ad campaign financed by the billionaire Koch brothers provide fresh evidence that efforts to thwart the reform law will be with us for at least the next couple of election cycles.

These developments represent a growing conundrum for the sane wing of the Republican Party in a purple state like Nevada: Does the party continue to oppose health reform and all-things Obama to keep its base happy only to risk alienating the growing ranks of middle- and low-income Nevadans who now possess decent health insurance coverage?

Does the party also risk the ire of physicians and hospitals who stand to see more paying patients and less uncompensated care with reform, or the wrath of an insurance industry gaining thousands of new customers through the exchanges and thousands more through Medicaid managed care contracts?

My guess is that “repeal and replace” will remain a rallying cry for conservatives for the foreseeable future, yet will take on an increasingly shrill tone for the millions of individuals and small businesses who, prior to the ACA, had been priced out of the health insurance market and thus denied access to affordable health care.

At the end of the day, the limited and unrealistic proposals advanced by the ACA's conservative critics would do little to reign in health care costs and absolutely nothing to reduce the ranks of the uninsured in Nevada or the rest of the country.

Warts and all, the Affordable Care Act continues to tackle one of the most pressing health policy issues in our country: the financial and health-related hardships faced by nearly 50 million uninsured Americans.

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