

A Thank You Message from ACEP President Rebecca Parker Regarding Recent Congressional Activity on Health Care Reform

Following last week's pivotal events in the Senate, I would like to thank you and the thousands of other ACEP members who contacted their legislators in the past months on behalf of emergency medicine and our patients. Your voice in the process as Congress considered far-reaching health reform measures was a critical one and helped to prevent the passage of legislation that would have had devastating consequences for patients seeking emergency medical care and threaten coverage for tens of millions of Americans. Our efforts to improve the health care system for our patients and the profession are not over and we hope you will consider [remaining active in ACEP's 911 Network](#) so that you can help emergency physicians be heard on the many future issues to come.

What Happened?

Emergency Medicine Principles for Reform

In January when the 115th Congress first convened, health care reform was at the top of the agenda, centering on the future of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), or Obamacare. The ACEP Board of Directors therefore issued [an outline of emergency medicine health care reform principles](#) on January 12 that outlined the critical elements we wanted to see included in any reform efforts, including improvements we felt needed to be made to the ACA. We shared these principles with every Member of Congress as we maintained our commitment to working with the new Congress and the Trump Administration to cultivate a health care system that expands access for all patients, encourages innovation, and ensures the continued availability of health care providers.

By the time of our annual Leadership and Advocacy Conference in Washington, D.C. in March, the House of Representatives was considering various proposals to repeal and replace the ACA, and the primary focus of our advocacy during our members' visits to Capitol Hill was to emphasize our adherence to these principles when evaluating support for the repeal bill under development.

A First Action Alert

An iteration of that legislation known as the American Health Care Act (AHCA), or H.R. 1628, in late March contained language that would potentially strip away mandatory insurance coverage of emergency medical care. Our first Action Alert urged House members to instead maintain the protections that patients currently have in accessing emergency medical care, and made it clear that ACEP could not support legislation unless it did so. **Many of you responded, and your voices were heard** among tens of thousands of other advocates across the country – House leadership pulled the AHCA from consideration just hours before the House was scheduled to vote on the bill.

House Passage

The following month the House released a newly revised AHCA, and through another Action Alert we urged Members of Congress to vote against it. This version of the bill also would have allowed insurance plans to be sold that do not cover emergency medical care as an essential health benefit, would lead to more Americans not having any health coverage at all, and would do little to improve our nation's health. Yet under enormous pressure from past campaign promises, the House narrowly approved (217 to 213) the American Health Care Act on May 4 despite the opposition of a host of stakeholders including ACEP, the American Hospital Association, AARP, the AMA, and many, many others.

On to the Senate

In June, we turned our efforts to the U.S. Senate where ACEP leadership and staff continued to meet with key members of the Senate engaged in developing that chamber's version of ACA repeal and replace. Although we initially believed the Senate's version of the legislation would be much more in line with our emergency medicine principles, the process and the final product were in fact much worse. ACEP issued a statement in late June that was deeply critical of the draft health care legislation introduced in the Senate, known as the Better Care Reconciliation Act, or BCRA. We continued to hold out hope that given ample opportunity to discuss and amend the gaping holes in this legislation, it would improve. **But our concerns, which were shared by virtually every other medical group, went unheard.**

We put out a new Action Alert to urge Senators to vote 'no' on BCRA because it made sweeping changes to the health care system that directly contradicted ACEP's principles and endangered patient safety and patients' lives, and cited a recent Morning Consult poll in which Americans overwhelmingly — 95 percent — wanted health insurance companies to be required to cover emergency medical care.

A Dramatic Finale

After a tumultuous week of scrambling and last-minute changes to the bill by Senate Republican leadership to get enough votes, Sens. Susan Collins (R-ME), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and John McCain (R-AZ) joined all Senate Democrats early Friday morning to defeat a significantly pared down "skinny repeal" bill, effectively ending (at least for now) Republican efforts to repeal or even significantly modify the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

What's Next?

Looking ahead, [we are now urging lawmakers on both sides of the aisle](#) to work together to address the serious problems that still exist involving the health insurance market. These solutions must include appropriate protections for the tens of millions of emergency medical patients that go to emergency departments each year.

Stay Active in the 911 Network

To remain engaged in the process and to continue to have a voice in what happens next on health reform and other legislative issues important to the emergency medicine profession, we urge you to participate in [ACEP's 911 Network](#). **As a result of ACEP's advocacy response, we have added all those that took action to the 911 Network. If you would prefer to opt out, please simply respond "NO" to this e-mail** or visit the [ACEP Advocacy Website](#). As a 911 Network Member, you will receive periodic email updates and occasional action alerts from the ACEP Washington DC Office so that you can stay current on the latest federal legislative, political and regulatory issues impacting emergency medicine. You will be joining thousands of your ACEP colleagues to foster relationships with Members of Congress and their legislative staff to educate them on the practice and delivery of emergency medicine. ACEP 911 Network Members are also invited to host local emergency department visits for Members of Congress, participate in teleforums throughout the year, and often serve as health care experts for in-district health roundtables for Members of Congress.

We hope you will also consider signing up to participate in ACEP's "White Coat Day on Capitol Hill" on November 1 during ACEP17 in Washington, D.C. You do not have to be registered for the ACEP17 conference to participate. For more information, [click here](#).

Sincerely,

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ACEP President



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