

Letter from a tutor in the Virginia community college system

17 August 2013

For thousands of state employees in Virginia, President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act (ACA) will not only leave them without health insurance, but also without the means to survive. The ACA mandates that businesses with over 50 employees must provide health insurance to those working 30 hours or more, but the solution was simple for Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell: cap part-time employees at 29 hours a week.

This is not a novel idea, and has already been enacted in the private sector, most notably by restaurant chains like Papa John's and Olive Garden. Perhaps it is no surprise that Virginia was the first state to make these devastating changes a full two years before the 30-hour rule kicks in. Gov. McDonnell was recently voted one of the worst and most corrupt governors in America by D.C. group, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, but time will show that it doesn't take a corrupt governor to apply draconian measures to some of the hardest working members of society.

Virginia was one of the first states to shamefully utilize this loophole in the ACA, but it won't be the last. Ohio, New Jersey and Pennsylvania have followed suit, and in each case it is adjunct professors who are taking the worst beating.

Adjuncts play a critical role in both two-year and four-year colleges, now teaching 70 percent of all college courses. Virginia's 9,000 adjuncts have never been offered health insurance, and in most cases, even though they take on the work load of a full-time employee, they are only paid around \$20,000, a \$40,000 difference from their tenured co-workers.

Now that adjuncts are being forced to take as much as a one-third pay cut, it is a guarantee that their annual income will fall far below the poverty line. This devastating blow to Virginia's educators is hardly exceptional, but is indicative of a larger trend among

both Democrats and Republicans of placing austerity on the working class, while corporate profits continue to soar to unknown heights.

The hypocrisy of Virginia's reactionary and, unfortunately, prophetic measures in regard to the ACA reached its zenith when on February 12, Gov. McDonnell honored 12 Virginia educators with the 2013 Outstanding Faculty Reward. McDonnell stated that, "the academic work of these 12 outstanding educators benefits not only the students at their respective institutions, but all Virginians."

One would think that such beneficial citizens, whose efforts affect the lives of "all Virginians," would be treated with the respect and dignity they deserve, but McDonnell would rather pay lip-service to their noble achievement while systematically ensuring that the majority of future educators will never be able to survive on an educator's wage.

For those professors with families, or student loan debt, the 29-hour cap is nothing short of an attack on their means of survival. Some adjuncts are quitting in protest, while others say they start to shake whenever they think about how they are going to make ends meet. For those students already in debt and looking to become college professors, this new law will only serve as a deterrent for potentially inspiring and rewarding professors.

The two major parties in American politics serve the financial elite, therefore it is no surprise that they have continually bowed to corporate interests and found ways to avoid implementing the Affordable Care Act in any fashion that would do justice to its name. Both public and private sector workers are being targeted for pay cuts to avoid providing the human right of health care, and both groups must come together to categorically oppose the fraud of the ACA.

What is needed is a political party that represents the

needs of the working class, one of the most fundamental being affordable and accessible health care. As Gov. McDonnell said, adjuncts in Virginia benefit all Virginias, and adjuncts across the United States benefit the country as a whole. It is time adjuncts, and all workers, are given the security of health insurance and a wage they can live on. Anything less is an outright attack on the very people who build and sustain this country.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact