

Thousands attend Democratic Party health care rally in Warren, Michigan

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Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders and Senate Democratic Party majority leader Chuck Schumer were the headline speakers at a Sunday rally in Warren, Michigan, in suburban Detroit, as part of the kickoff of a media campaign against the repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

The rally in Warren was one of dozens of rallies held Sunday in cities across the United States called by the Democratic Party to permit it to posture as an opponent of Trump and mislead the growing popular opposition to the incoming right-wing Republican administration. Congressional Republicans have set as their first order of business the repeal of the ACA, also known as Obamacare, without as yet spelling out any replacement.

The Warren event was conceived of as a token protest against repeal of the ACA. The original venue was to be a United Auto Workers regional union hall, with a seating capacity of less than 1,000. However, so many people indicated interest in attending that organizers decided to hold the rally instead at an outdoor stage at a local community college. In the event perhaps five thousand people turned out, in subfreezing temperatures, speaking to the disquiet felt among wide layers of the population over the policies of the incoming Trump administration.

In contrast to the sentiments of most in the crowd, the Democrats' opposition to the incoming Trump administration was hypocritical and insincere. This was demonstrated by the lack of any concrete proposals advanced by speakers for organizing a fight. In fact the name "Trump" was only occasionally mentioned.

Also speaking at the rally were a long list of Democratic Party notables including the two Democratic senators from Michigan, Gary Peters and Debbie Stabenow, as well Representatives Brenda Lawrence, Dan Kildee, John Conyers and Debbie Dingell. In addition Cecile Richards, president of Planned Parenthood, and United Auto Workers Vice President Cindy Estrada were on the

speakers list.

The Democratic Party rallies against repeal of the ACA are largely a public relations operation to provide a façade of opposition to Trump. In reality the Democrats are maneuvering behind the scenes with the Republicans over a replacement for Obamacare that will preserve the profits of the drug companies, hospitals and health insurance providers. In particular they will insist on the maintenance of reactionary provisions revamping the reimbursement system to health care providers that cut costs by limiting availability.

Any replacement for the ACA would require the vote of at least eight Democratic senators to secure passage because of the supermajority of 60 needed to end a filibuster. In the end it is likely that the Republicans will secure the votes needed for whatever reactionary bill is crafted with the Democrats cynically arguing that the alternative would be chaos.

All of the Democratic Party speakers at the Warren rally, including Sanders, presented the ACA as a progressive reform of healthcare. The remarks of Schumer were particularly absurd. He hailed Obamacare as the virtual realization of universal healthcare. "Before ACA our healthcare system was a mess," he intoned. Now, he claimed, "we have affordable healthcare for all."

In fact the ACA was an attack on healthcare dressed up as a reform. It was designed to cut costs for the government and the insurance industry, which played a central role in crafting the legislation. It contained an "individual mandate" requiring those not covered by insurance to purchase a plan or face fines, with some subsidies for those with lower incomes.

The central thrust of the ACA was to undermine the system of employer-paid health insurance in favor of a system that forced workers to provide their own coverage through the private health insurance market.

Huge premium hikes for private insurance under the

ACA were announced just prior to the November presidential election, fueling popular anger. Trump and the Republicans were able to capitalize on some of this anger by demagogically posing as defenders of health care for working people.

In reality the Republican proposal to abolish the ACA without a replacement threatens to leave some 20 million without any health insurance at all.

Sanders, who judged by the audience response was clearly the main draw at the event, only spoke briefly. He engaged in empty tub-thumping against the Republicans while presenting the defense of the ACA as the first step toward establishing a system of universal healthcare. “Our job is to tell the Republicans you are not going to throw 20 million people off Medicaid, you are not going to privatize Medicare, you are not going to defund Planned Parenthood, you are not going to raise the costs of prescription drugs for seniors.”

The prostration of Sanders before the Trump administration was underscored in his Sunday Morning appearance on the ABC News program “This Week,” on which Sanders confirmed that he would be attending Trump’s inauguration along with the defeated Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.

The electoral collapse of the Democratic Party in the November election, due to the reactionary and bankrupt policies it pursued, means the Democrats do not have the votes in Congress to block the repeal of the ACA. They are fearful however, that the provocative actions of the Republican majority could unleash a popular backlash that they might not be able to control.

Indeed, Sanders offered friendly advice to his Republican “colleagues” declaring, “What we are saying to the Republicans, if you want to improve the Affordable Care Act, let’s work together.” He continued, “I say to Republicans that you will have to worry about [Senate and House Democrats], but that is the least of your worries. You are going to have to worry about millions of people who are standing up and fighting back and are demanding the day that healthcare be a right of all people.”

A *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team spoke to some of those attending the event. A number indicated repeal of the ACA would have significant consequences. Lynette Shine said, “I know a lot of people in the arts, who are dependent on this because we do not provide sufficient support. They are freelancers, and they make money, but the ability to be covered is not possible because it is contract based.”

WSWS supporters explained that the ACA was not a step toward universal healthcare but was in fact a counter reform aimed at opening up a giant new market for private insurers while moving away from employer-based coverage.

While there was universal opposition to Republican plans to repeal the ACA, a number of attendees expressed lack of confidence in the ability or willingness of the Democrats to wage a real fight against the incoming Trump administration. Brandon, a legal assistant, said, “I am an independent, but I often vote Democratic. I voted for Bernie Sanders in the primary but I voted for Clinton in the November election.” He added, “I think the Democratic Party is in a real mess right now. I read that Obama has just expanded NSA spying, that is worrying.”

He continued, “Trump is a monster. There is a real fear that people will lose their rights. I think if you repeal ACA it will have a ripple effect throughout the healthcare industry.” He added, “I think universal healthcare is the only way you get something that works. You look at every other country in the world.”

Another attendee, who said she had worked in broadcast media, said she was worried by the lack of any concrete proposals on the part of speakers to fight the Trump administration. “I think they needed to be more specific action steps. They did not get us as energized as they should have.”

She said she was worried what would happen after the ACA repeal. “My husband is delaying retirement so I don’t lose my healthcare. I think the Democrats need more clarity in their message. In fact the ACA was based on the Republican plan.”



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