

Illinois Democrat's health care roundtable event marked by frustration, anger

A WSWWS reporting team
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About 100 people attended Democratic Representative Bradley Schneider's Healthcare Roundtable event on Friday afternoon in Waukegan, Illinois. Schneider is the representative for the 10th Congressional district, which sits in the far northeast corner of the state on Lake Michigan. The district itself is demographically diverse and markedly unequal, including several of the affluent northern suburbs of Chicago as well as the large working class and immigrant populations in the cities of North Chicago and Waukegan.

Schneider has worked in insurance and as a management consultant, and he and his wife, an insurance executive, are estimated by *Crain's* to be worth more than \$10 million.

The event was called in response to the deep social anger and fear provoked by the Republican-led effort, now in the Senate under the name Better Care Reconciliation Act (BCRA), to repeal most of the 2010 Affordable Care Act (ACA) and all but formally destroy the Medicaid program serving low-income households, the elderly, women, children, and those with disabilities. The BCRA also provides a number of tax breaks and corporate incentives to medical device companies, and is currently estimated to significantly increase the health care costs for tens of millions of Americans, while throwing more than 20 million people off coverage altogether.

The official event was heavily stage-managed and calculated to play on the emotions, with personal statements made by two women and a teenaged boy who face very serious health problems and testified to being helped by the ACA. Schneider homed in on the Medicaid expansion element of the ACA as a success and highlighted the Republican attack on it. With shameless complacency, the representative explained

the event was important for putting a face on the bill and slowing the repeal process, which will drive large sections of workers to self-ration medical care, ending up in emergency rooms only after problems are far advanced, and end lives prematurely.

The expansion of the Medicaid rolls in Illinois, as in other states, is a testament to how dramatically poverty has grown in the state. The ACA expansion itself added only 64,000 to Illinois' Medicaid coverage. According to HealthInsurance.org, Medicaid covers more than 3 million in Illinois—about a quarter of the state's 12.9 million residents—including 50 percent of childbirths, 47 percent of children, and 18 percent of seniors and those with disabilities. A household of two must make below 138 percent of the federal poverty level, or a mere \$1,845 per month, in order to qualify for the program.

In his brief remarks, Schneider revealed the vast social chasm between the Democratic Party and the working population of the state. He presented himself as a beacon of bipartisan cooperation, and declared, "I am reaching my hand out" to Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who appointed the 13 Republican senators charged with authoring the BCRA.

The audience quickly grew impatient with Schneider's self-satisfied descriptions of bipartisan breakfast meetings, and began to demand answers about what he was doing to lower skyrocketing premiums and deductibles and the highly-restricted provider networks imposed by the ACA.

Two teachers spoke up to counter Schneider's complacency about the ACA, explaining that it is difficult to afford and few doctors accept the ACA plans. Chris, a Waukegan teacher, said, "Maybe the ACA is better than nothing, but it's still \$200 a month

for my daughter and it's very hard to find a doctor.” Chris explained he had to drive 80 miles west to Rockford for her to be seen.

Frustrated with the smugness of the Democrats, he continued, “Democrats are content to watch the Republicans flounder. Come up with a solution. Say, ‘Here’s a plan that will improve this.’”

Another teacher, who identified herself as a mother of an autistic teenager, asked, “What if he can’t find a job and get his meds? One of these medications is listed at \$700. If you are coming up with bipartisan plans, what is going to keep these costs down? I mean, really, what will you do?”

Dan, an insurance salesman from Gurnee, spoke to demand that Rep. Schneider force the hospital networks to accept the health insurance policies. “We don’t want to wait for McConnell to have breakfast with you. What can you do with [insurer] Blue Cross/Blue Shield and the hospitals who take our money and not pay for the health care? Three major hospital networks in Lake County will not take the ACA policies. And no one should have to drive to Rockford for a procedure.”

Another woman broke in to say, “Why can’t we just have universal health care?”

Andrew, a Lake County resident, spoke up to agree, “Even in extremely conservative Alberta [Canada], universal health care works very well. People love it. There’s no reason we can’t have it here too!”

In an effort to respond to the participants, Schneider revealed his party’s class position very clearly. He said, “We can talk about the problems all day. Insurance is based on math, based on underwriting. It’s the gateway to health care.” In other words, the bipartisan agreement exists, and it is on the rationing of health care on a class basis—you may have it if you can pay, and you will be denied it if you can’t.

At that point, several participants began to exit in disgust.

One resident asked what everyone can be doing to help solve the health care crisis. Schneider responded without a trace of irony, as though the question of “help” meant “where should we invest?” He encouraged the crowd of workers, disabled workers, and retirees to support the health non-profits, like the American Cancer Society and the Alzheimer’s Association, and support health care innovation that can lower costs.

Health care is a ~~World~~ right. The *Site* encourages all working people to get involved with the Socialist Equality Party and work to build the movement of the working class that will end for-profit delivery of health care by ending the capitalist profit system and its wars.



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