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Democrats are mismanaging their Obamacare message. It's not just for the poor | Opinion

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Democrats and other supporters of Obamacare, the Affordable Care Act, are mismanaging their message. They need to make clear that it helps all 304 million Americans with health insurance, not just the poor and other new enrollees.

Reverend William J. Barber, charismatic leader for the Poor People's Campaign, said on Feb. 19, "The poor and low wealth people are 41% of the vote." That may be true but it's not enough to beat Donald Trump in the swing states or the popular vote across America.

Barber is reducing his potential coalition — and so are Biden surrogates like HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra, who spoke to the National Press Club on Feb. 8. Becerra said in the creation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), informally Obamacare, enrolled “nearly 21-and-a-half million Americans today.”

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Becerra only lightly mentioned that his department, as allowed by law, is negotiating with pharmaceutical companies for lower prices. Merck and other drug companies are suing against Medicare price negotiations but it is in the legislation, and Becerra told the Press Club the negotiations are proceeding.

The plus side of Obamacare is not just about adding new enrollees but cutting the uninsured non-elderly in half, from 18 percent to 9 percent. Becerra and other advocates need to say clearly and boldly that because of Obamacare, ALL 304 million Americans with health insurance now are covered for pre-existing conditions, negotiations on lowering drug prices already have caused a big drop to \$35 insulin for seniors (and soon regardless of age)

instead of hundreds on each bill. Next year seniors will have their whole prescription drugs bill capped at \$2,000 total annually. Children to age 26 are now covered on family plans, and preventive care for all is provided. Americans need all of this to improve our mortality rates, yet if you ask Republicans what they would leave out of their "new" replacement plan, they say none of these provisions.

Such opponents with no answer on what to replace are in fact supporting Obamacare's key elements. They simply wanted to call the ACA a "job killer," also far from the truth since the ACA has caused 24 percent of new jobs in 2023 to provide new health care services for new enrollees and all Americans with the new benefits.

Florida has 4,985,731 seniors as of 2023 but only 11.2 percent are uninsured under Medicare or any other health care insurance.

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Donald Trump said on Jan. 7, "We're gonna fight for much better healthcare than Obamacare. Obamacare is a catastrophe." Tell that to the ghost of John McCain, who protected the ACA with his thumbs down to block replacement by a "skinny" ACA in July 2017, or to Chief Justice John Roberts who said and decided several times that Congress had the power to enact the ACA and its provisions.

Florida's great seniors champion, Claude Pepper, used to say how much of a mistake it would be to "means test Social Security." You'd lose the support of many influential people in the coalition, he'd point out, ultimately causing Social Security to be weakened. For Pepper's entire career, he was also one of the strongest advocates of "health care for all."

Pepper's message would be that the same is true of the ACA's health care coalition – it's for all Americans. Now a large and growing majority of Americans, 59 percent as reported by POLITICO, approve of ACA. Some 4.2 million Floridians signed up for ACA, a 31 percent increase from last year.

When the new higher job numbers and lower unemployment numbers are discussed as good for our economy, why not emphasize the 24 percent of the new jobs in health care? If reversed, it would kill jobs – and, likely, people – with many losing their insurance.

Floridians and all Americans want their health insurance. Democrats and other health care law supporters need and are justified in a wider message on one of their prime issues.

Robert Weiner was Chief of Staff for Congressman Claude Pepper (D-Miami) and his House Subcommittee on Health, and the full House Aging committee, before Weiner was a spokesman in the Clinton and George W. Bush White Houses. **Gene Lambey** is a policy analyst at Robert Weiner Associates and Solution For Change.