



## Nurses in the forefront to save healthcare





# Nurses taking action on many fronts

**R**arely in modern times have challenges to patient advocacy come at nurses from so many directions, with such profound implications. Yet NYSNA nurses, with their keen knowledge of the human condition and a powerful sense of duty to patients, have distinguished themselves at the very time when healthcare and the fight for guaranteed quality healthcare for all are center stage.

NYSNA nurses took action as extraordinary patient and community advocates, organizing themselves and others to make issues known and demand results. They understand the many challenges surrounding healthcare on both the state and national levels.

In recent weeks, nurses have stepped up in New York State on the critical issues of scope of practice. During the same time, they have spoken forcefully for the protection of underserved communities in New York, advocating for safety net hospitals in legislation to equitably fund public hospitals, rural facilities and private hospitals that care for the greatest share of the poor and uninsured. In the course of these same

crucial weeks, nurses joined the national battle to defeat a law that would deny care to millions.

In hospitals and communities, they formed plans that resulted in focused actions of protest, demanding quality care for all patients over profits for the few. (The photos displayed here are of the many actions in which RNs took part in recent weeks.)

## The fight in New York State

The battle in New York took shape in February, as a state budget proposal was unveiled that would create a “Health Care Regulation Modernization Team”. This team would be made up of 25 voting members stacked heavily in favor of industry.

Most directly threatening to RNs, the “Team,” acting in the name of “greater efficiency,” would propose changes that would erode or even eliminate existing scope of practice regulations.

Highly-skilled nurses would be replaced by workers without the

## American Health Care Act: Rx for Demise

- # of people who lose coverage next year: NYS 1 million; US 14 million
- # of people who would lose coverage by 2026: NYS 2.8 million; US-24 million
- Healthcare job loss by 2022: NYS 90,000; US 1.8 million
- Medicaid cuts: NYS \$97 billion (2019-2028); US \$880 billion (2017-2026)
- Tax cuts from the bill going to top 5%. \$346 billion over ten years.

training of an RN. Non-nurses could be forced by management to take on RN duties without proper training or pay. The de-skilling of the nursing profession would be a disservice to patients, families and the communities who count on RNs for care.

Taken together, with less oversight and more “self-regulation,” this effort would constitute a significant shift of authority to industry and away from healthcare and community advocates.

## “Every patient deserves a registered nurse!”

Nurses sprang into action to stop the attack on scope of practice and to protect patient care. Under the banner, “Every Patient Deserves a Registered Nurse!,” cards were distributed throughout NYSNA hospitals. They were signed by the thousands. Nurses made phone calls to legislators to urge that

the proposal not be included in the final state budget.

At the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Conference, the weekend of February 18-19, NYSNA members from around the state gathered more signatures and delivered thousands of cards to the entrance of the NYS Department of Health, the government entity that would carry out the regulatory changes to which we so fervently object.

There was enormous progress. Nurses won in the State Assembly! They stopped the proposal from its inclusion in that chamber’s draft budget. This was a tremendous victory for nurses, patients and their families, as the State Assembly showed its understanding of what was behind industry’s effort at so-called “efficiency.”

## Focus on the State Senate

At the same time, nurses were working to inform State Senators about the “Team” and the harm that it would cause given its mandate. A huge volume of calls were made to members of that chamber, as well, and nurses added signatures to protest cards.

We were heard. When the Senate released its budget, it had considerably watered down the “Team’s” mandate. In fact, its version did not include the scope of practice language—another key win for nurses and patients. Our efforts continue now, and will continue in the future, any time efforts to reduce quality care in a two-tier system are masqueraded as “efficiencies.”

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# Nurses taking action

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## All out against the AHCA

Nurses protested the AHCA across the state, joining rallies and calling legislators in droves. Several, including Rep. Dan Donovan, said they would vote NO, and several were neutral in the end. We did our part in showing the administration that there were not sufficient votes for the AHCA and a vote on the floor of the House was cancelled.

This was a very significant victory for all Americans seeking a fair and equitable system of healthcare access. But this battle is not over, as Speaker Paul Ryan and others have announced an intention to re-introduce a bill to repeal the Affordable Care Act.

Nurses took notice of efforts by Reps. Collins and Faso to effectively limit Medicaid funding to NYC by introducing an amendment to the AHCA. Gov. Cuomo said that the Collins/Faso amendment would mean substantial loss in current health coverage for 2.7 million New Yorkers statewide.

## CBO report helped undo AHCA

The flaws contained in the American Health Care Act, legislation supported by the administration and put forward by House Speaker Ryan to repeal the ACA, were so many and so profound as to be overwhelming. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, a highly respected research arm of Congress responsible for reporting on legislation, released its findings on March 13 with devastating consequences for the bill.

The CBO reported that 14 million Americans would lose health coverage next year and 24 million over the next decade. For the most vulnerable, premiums would skyrocket. The CBO estimated that for 64 year olds making \$26,500 premiums would rise more than sevenfold in 2026.

NYSNA wrote to Congressional leaders objecting to the AHCA and citing the CBO findings, among other data, trends and findings.

## Prospect of hospital closings

Medicaid—which covers 74 million Americans, one-third of the nation's population—would

undergo devastating cuts under AHCA. CBO reported that Medicaid beneficiaries would be reduced by 14 million in the next decade. The cuts, reported

*The New York Times*, would hurt “poor and middle-class families caring for their children with autism or dying parents....” The *Times* estimated that Medicaid cuts under the AHCA would have affected 36 million children.

The loss of Medicaid funds in New York per the terms of the AHCA had the potential to cause the closing of more than two dozen hospitals, many staffed by NYSNA members. This loss threatened by the AHCA amounted to billions of dollars in NYS alone. This money would be used for tax cuts Congressional supporters of the AHCA have promised, but not for working families. Rather, the tax cuts would have gone to multi-millionaires and billionaires. This explains why the super-rich were pushing hard for the AHCA.

In an effort to appease the most conservative House members and grab needed votes, “Essential Benefits”—a key provision of the ACA—were put on the chopping block by AHCA proponents. This would have meant that insurers would have been able to eliminate key benefits, including hospitalization, maternity care, prescription drugs, mental health treatment and lab services.

Cuts to essential care, billionaire tax breaks. It is no wonder that nurses were all out against the AHCA—at pickets, rallies and working phone banks.

However, this battle is not over, as the administration is reconsidering a new bill not unlike the AHCA. Our opposition will continue and nurses will be front and center in the fight. Our patients, our jobs, our society are at stake.

