



Death by a thousand cuts: Trump's attacks on our health care

“Every time these attempts occur to shut down affordable healthcare in our country, the pushback gets louder and more fierce. And young people have continued to be the loudest in the room.” Kristin McGuire

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Welcome to Code WACK!, where we shine a light on America’s callous healthcare system, how it hurts us and what we can do about it. I’m your host **Brenda Gazzar**.

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This time on **Code WACK!** How are young people pushing back against a potential rollback that could once again block **DACA recipients, or Dreamers**, and thousands of others from enrolling in Affordable Care Act coverage? And why do advocates call this potential move by the Trump administration *extremely dangerous*?

To find out, we spoke with **Kristin McGuire**, executive director of Young Invincibles, the nation’s largest young adult policy and advocacy organization. Kristin leads efforts to elevate the voices of young adults in the political process and expand their access to economic opportunity.

This is the second episode in our two-part series.

Welcome to **Code WACK!** Kristin! Last time, we talked about how DACA recipients, who were brought to the U.S. as children and grew up here, could lose eligibility for affordable and subsidized health coverage. A new rule proposed by the Trump Administration would once again block DACA recipients from buying Marketplace insurance or receiving financial assistance. How are young people organizing against this proposed rollback?

McGuire: So it's been really great. Young people are afraid, young people are frustrated. They're using their voices, they're expressing their concerns. You can check 'em out on social media, on TikTok. Some of our most viral videos that Young Invincibles are about how to use health insurance, and so what I love to see is we're able to talk to young people, tell them about health care, explain to them what's going on, and they're able to go out and talk to their friends. And we're seeing this effect, this spider web effect where it's spreading out. And young people are becoming trusted messengers in their families, on their campuses, and in their social networks. This is especially so in our immigrant communities and our families of color. Many times the students that we work with have served as like the translator in their families growing up. So when it comes to something about understanding health insurance, they learn the information and then they go tell their parents, their grandparents about it. So now we're educating multi-generational households, and so that hands-on work, that high-touch work is something that I'm the most proud of, and I'm so, so happy that [Young Invincibles] is able to be a part of it. We provide timely, accurate information so that young people can respond and spread the information as they see fit.

Q: So do we know when a decision will be made on this proposed rule? What is the status as of now?

McGuire: Right now, I know they're in the budgeting process, and so I'm not sure how long it will take. But what I do know is during reconciliation, we've had several programs. We're doing webinars and educating young people on when they can provide comment, who they can talk to, how to talk to their members of Congress. And so we want to make sure that we engage in every moment of the timeline moving forward.

Q: That's great. So what can listeners do to fight this proposal by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services that would make DACA recipients ineligible for this subsidized healthcare coverage?

McGuire: So there's a couple of things they can do. They can share their stories. We have a story hub at Young Invincibles website where people can go on there and share their stories, and we will share it with the appropriate people with media, with government officials, just to make sure we amplify the young adult voice. And you don't have to be a young adult to participate because at this point we think it's all hands on deck. Also mobilizing others, talking to your neighbors, your friend circles and ensuring that everyone understands what's at stake. Also calling and emailing your representatives. We have to let our members of Congress know that this is unacceptable, and this is not what we desire as voters in this country.

We are allowed to apply political pressure to CMS and introduce legislation to protect or expand access to health care and not the opposite. Public comments aren't always just symbolic. They're actually part of the official legal record. So if the rule is challenged in court down the line, a strong public response can be cited as evidence that the agency possibly ignored key harms, or failed to consider the full impact of this decision. So when we're saying make public comment, we're not saying that just to do it, to feel like you participated, we're saying, help us prepare for what is to come.

Q: Wow, that's a really good point. When have we seen public outcry shift similar policy proposals in the past - and what gives you hope this time?

McGuire: I would say in health care, we've seen several attempts to repeal and roll back health care. We've seen this happen before and they've been unsuccessful. So we know that there's precedent and power in people actually showing up, showing out and stopping bad policy. We've also seen this happen in a positive way like this is why the Affordable Care Act exists in the first place, because the country stood up and said, 'no, actually we do want better access to health care.' So we've seen it happen.

Every time these attempts occur to shut down affordable health care in our country, the pushback gets louder and more fierce, and young people have continued to be the loudest in the room, which is really ironic because our age group was the age group that they thought wouldn't care about this in the first place. So at this point, this rule is really vulnerable to public pressure. This is the time to make those phone calls, go on record, make public comment. And across our issue areas at Young Invincibles, we've seen this happen time and time again. The people power is the most powerful, right? We need the American people to engage and, and let our government know what we want.

Q: Right? And the thing is, you don't always know who's a DACA recipient or Dreamer—they're so integrated into society, right?

McGuire: Yeah, we won't know who these people are, right? Because that, that would, that would require us asking them to reveal themselves. But what we do know is that we probably live next door to 'em. Right. And what we can't let is talking points convince us that our neighbors are no longer our neighbors. That our neighbors are no longer our classmates, that classmates are people we no longer care about. So what I know is that I was born here, and that I can advocate on behalf of people who maybe don't feel like they have a voice anymore. Because what I know is, regardless of people's immigration status, I know I love my neighbors. I know I love my classmates. I know I wish no harm on the folks that I'm in the grocery store with. And because of that, I will make a call to my representative because I have a voice. My voice is powerful, and that's what we all should be doing right now. I have an interest in the welfare of my country, and so I have to do what I need to do to ensure that the outcomes that I desire are the outcomes that are being addressed.

Q: Great. Thank you so much for speaking to that. What message would you want to send to lawmakers considering this proposal, especially those who claim to support Dreamers?

McGuire: That's a really great question. I think that if there are lawmakers who truly support Dreamers and support the future of Dreamers in our country, they have to stand up and be loud with their colleagues as well. And I mean this at all levels of government, not only our congressional members. We need our city

councils, our mayors, our state representatives to be able to talk to the members of Congress and say, 'this is what my community desires.' Because another thing we know is that our city officials know who lives in our city, what the makeup of our city looks like. So if there's anyone who can speak up to what's going on, it's the folks who kind of represent us at that local level. And we have to be very vocal about it. People's livelihoods should not be politicized. It's just [that] access to health care, access to basic needs should not be a political talking point. Not here, not in America.

Q: Right. So if this rollback is allowed to go through, what precedent might it set for other groups or other kinds of coverage protection?

McGuire: I think it's going to be extremely dangerous, and it's going to open up the pathway for more extreme and more dangerous restrictions to health care. We're already seeing this with the proposed Medicaid cuts in the budget reconciliation process that went through markup and then the ACA Supreme Court case that attacked preventative services. So if actions like these are allowed to continue to persist, we're opening the door for making health care something that is a privilege for wealthy people rather than a right for everyone. And I think that's the bottom line here is that we have to stop these threats as they happen so that we don't open the flood gates.

Q: That's right. And it reminds me of that saying 'first they came for the socialists, and I wasn't socialist so I didn't say anything, and then they came for this other group, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't one of them.' But really no one is safe in that situation.

McGuire: That's right 'cause the last line of that is then they came for me and no one was left.

Q: Yes, And hopefully this rollback doesn't go through, but if it does, what do you think would happen in response? A lawsuit, I presume?

McGuire: I'm sure there would be a lawsuit which is why our advocacy now is very important. I think there's going to be a moment where people will if this goes through, folks will lose access to coverage, of course. I think people will become

afraid if this happens. And then I think what we're gonna create is immeasurable harm, right? Because we will work very diligently to get the outcome reversed, but we'll be starting back. We've been working for years to educate people about the existence of healthcare coverage, right? And there's anecdotal knowledge that goes on for years and years and years. And then when there's a shift in policy, we have to like double time the work to educate the populace that something has changed. That work takes years. So if we take a group of people, we take away their care, tell them they're no longer eligible, we'll then have to work for several years to say, 'never mind, the law has changed again and now you do have access.'

So a small policy shift like this creates three to five years of education and outreach to then inform people. 'cause Word spreads really fast amongst families and communities, the negative word. So to change that process requires a lot of work. I can share a quick story. Pre-ACA in California, Medi-Cal was for women and children, or if the dad was the custodial parent, he had access to Medi-Cal. When the ACA became a law, men were able to apply whether or not they had had children. No one in the low income communities knew that. So at Young Invincibles, we had to do a Boys and Men of Color campaign, and this is in 2015, 2016. So that's what seven years after the law had changed, where people would still tell us, 'oh, I'm not eligible because I don't have children.' And we had to educate them. We did barbershop outreach campaigns where we worked in local barbershops educating young men that you could apply for health care.

Wow, that campaign sounds fantastic! What a smart idea.

McGuire: This was a group of people who just weren't seeking care at all because they believed the old rule and did not know that the law had changed.

Q: Really good point. I can see how ongoing education is vital in health care, especially when the rules keep changing. What else do you want us to know about the situation?

McGuire: Another important fact that I kind of mentioned, but not really was the cut to the Navigator program. Navigators are people whose job is to assist people in enrolling in the Affordable Care Act. So you might see these people in a grocery store, for example, or a different kind of store and they might have a booth set up

and they'll say, do you need help with signing up at healthcare.gov? It is these people's jobs to ensure that folks who maybe don't have access or the knowledge base to sign up on their own have the assistance to do so. That has been heavily subsidized by our government to ensure that we can pay these people to go into these communities.

The special part is that they are targeted in communities that already have the least access. Many of them speak a separate language that is specific to the communities they work in, to target these communities to ensure they have access to care. A 90% reduction in this program means that we are in essence cutting off the access to these services to the communities that need it the most. Right? And that cut is going to create harm in those communities that we just don't even have the resources right now to, to make up for.

Q: Mm. Is this part of the proposed rule that hasn't gone through yet?

McGuire: No, this has been cut. The navigator program was cut in February.

Got it. So this is something that was helping people enroll in the ACA that's unfortunately already been cut.

McGuire: Yes.

Q: So why do you think that's being targeted?

McGuire: I think the Affordable Care Act is being targeted, and so I think what's happening is this multi-pronged approach to reduce enrollment in the program. So when we look at the services to help people enroll, once you cut those, you'll reduce enrollment – just like this cut to DACA will reduce enrollment and so it's death by a thousand cuts.

Yeah, and then opponents can say, 'enrollment's going down. We don't need the ACA anyway.'

Q: Right. What do you think of single payer, Medicare for All?

McGuire: I think any program that's going to allow access to health care to the most people is possible, is a benefit for our country. At Young Invincibles, we support any policy that's going to get us to widespread, affordable, accessible care by any method. We're open to it. We're really supportive of quality, affordable - even free - access to health care. That is our long-term goal at Young Invincibles.

Q: Was there anything else you wanted to mention about Young Invincibles or about your advocacy?

McGuire: Young Invincibles is an organization we were founded around the fight for health care in 2009. And so it's important to us that the people participate in this battle with us. So I implore you to check out our social media, our website, younginvincibles.org, and join us. We're not asking for you to go out of your way, but if you share your story with us, if you contact your legislator, it will go further than you can imagine. Civic engagement is something we all have the right to. It's a key tenant of our nation's democracy, and we are the people, uh, who can make the changes that we need in this country.

Thank you Kristin McGuire of Young Invincibles.

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