The Delray Democrat

How Florida Republicans Are Killing Floridians[1]
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It's not rocket science. Simple logic suggests that people lacking health insurance are more likely to die prematurely . . . and unnecessarily. Because of the cost, the uninsured are likely to forgo regular check-ups and doctor's visits, so conditions that might have been treatable become intractable by the time the patient arrives at an emergency room. Not surprisingly, empirical studies have supported the link between a lack of health insurance and an untimely death.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) sought to reduce the number of uninsured Americans (and the attendant deaths) by expanding Medicaid to cover Americans too poor to purchase health insurance but earning too much to qualify for traditional Medicaid. The program began in 2014 and covered anyone earning up to 138% of the federal poverty rate.

For the first three years, the program was fully funded by the federal government, with its contribution gradually dropping to 90%, where it now stands. The ACA also included a stick to accompany the carrot – any state that refused to expand Medicaid would lose all federal funding for traditional Medicaid.

The U.S. Supreme Court upheld most parts of the ACA in 2014 but struck down Medicaid expansion as unconstitutionally coercive. States that chose to participate would still be reimbursed, but states that refused to participate could not be punished.

Florida has the fourth highest rate of uninsured in the country, behind only Georgia, Oklahoma, and Texas. Republicans firmly control state government, and they have refused to expand Medicaid even though the federal government would foot 90% of the cost. If the legislature passed and Ron DeSantis signed a bill expanding Medicaid, some 800,000 of the 2.8 million Floridians lacking health insurance would be covered . . . and lives would be saved.

How many lives? Or, more trenchantly, what is the human cost of their continued refusal? A pre-ACA study conducted at Harvard Medical School at a time when 45 million Americans lacked health insurance estimated that 45,000 people died annually as a result. Applying that ratio suggests 800 Floridians are dying needlessly every year because of Republican inaction, a figure roughly in line with a 2019 study that estimated the failure to expand Medicaid in Florida had led to 2,776 deaths over the prior 4 years.

It seems that Florida Republicans are more interested in inventing nonexistent problems to draft laws that would reduce turnout from Democrats (SB 90) or in criminalizing the protected First

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[1] *The Delray Democrat*, March 2021, p. 4.

Amendment activity of groups it disfavors (H.R. 1) than it is in protecting Floridians from dying prematurely. But Republicans have always put party before people.