

Strong health sign-ups under Obamacare encourage Democrats

DENVER (AP) — Republicans on the campaign trail this year will be eager to tout the potential benefits of their tax cut plan.

Voters like Jeanine Limone Draut, a freelance technical writer in Denver, have something else in mind: health care.

Failed efforts by congressional Republicans last year to repeal former President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act exposed not only deep divisions within the party but also revealed core benefits of the law that millions of Americans now take for granted. Draut is tired of the attacks and the uncertainty surrounding the law's future.

"As a small business owner, it just wrecks havoc on how you do business," Draut, an independent, said of the on-again, off-again repeal talk from Republicans. "I don't know if either party has a solution. My vote is pretty closely tied to my livelihood."

Both parties are paying attention, especially after a better-than-expected enrollment season under the health care law. Democrats especially have used health care to go on the attack, and the issue is coming up in congressional races in California, Colorado, Michigan, Washington and elsewhere. A Kaiser Family Foundation poll released Friday found health care as the top issue voters want congressional candidates to address.

Enrollment was especially robust in many of the states that operate their own insurance marketplaces, where enrollment periods were longer than on the federal exchange and promotional budgets were beefed up. Strong sign-ups came despite Republican attacks against the law and President Donald Trump's administration taking several steps to undermine it, including cutting the federal sign-up period in half and slashing advertising.

California, Colorado, Connecticut, Idaho, Maryland, New York, Vermont and other states with their own exchanges saw enrollment approach or surpass 2017 levels. Minnesota's health insurance exchange set a record for private plans with an enrollment period that was more than two weeks shorter than in 2017.

California's state exchange, the nation's largest, has reported more than 1.2 million renewals for 2018 and an additional 342,000 new customers. Its 2018 enrollment period doesn't end until Wednesday, as does New York's.

Democrats say the level of consumer interest presents a political opportunity.

"We're definitely making it an issue," said Jason Crow, a Democrat who is challenging five-term Republican Congressman Mike Coffman in a suburban Denver district.

Crow has criticized Coffman's vote for the GOP tax bill, which eliminated the tax penalty for people who don't get health insurance.

That move is expected to undermine the individual insurance market starting next year.

More than 22,000 people enrolled last year for coverage on the state exchange in Coffman's district, which went for Hillary Clinton in 2016.

"People in our district recognize the progress we've made under health care. The fact that 20 million more people have health care matters — it matters a lot," Crow said. "And under Trump, we are now moving in the opposite direction."

Coffman encountered hoots and boos at town halls last year for his insistence that Obama's health law be repealed, even though he eventually voted against the legislation. He insists that any replacement guarantee coverage for people with pre-existing conditions.

Coffman's campaign manager, Tyler Sandberg, described the incumbent's approach to health care as nuanced.

"His stance ultimately is about pre-existing conditions. It's something everyone can relate to," Sandberg said. "And if Democrats think they can hit him over the head with it, I think they're going to be sorely mistaken."

Democrats also are making health care a key part of their strategy in this year's race to select a successor to Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper. The Democrat last year worked with moderate Republican Gov. John Kasich of Ohio, lobbying Congress in an unsuccessful attempt to maintain the requirement that all Americans have health insurance.

Workers put finishing touches on Regional Health Clinic

STURGIS — In just a little over three weeks, Regional Health Sturgis will have all its 250 staff members under one roof. Currently, the Regional Health Sturgis Clinic is about a mile north of the hospital. If physicians and staff want to consult on a patient's case, they need to pick up the phone.

By combining all services and specialists within one central location, Sturgis Regional Health can offer patients greater access, more convenience, less duplication and better coordination of high-quality care, said Mark Schulte, president of Sturgis Regional Hospital and Sturgis Market.

"It will be a huge benefit for them to come to one space and do their work," he said. The move to the new facility will happen over a week-end and all services will be offered at the new clinic beginning Feb. 19. An open house and ribbon cutting is planned for March 1.

Thursday, the building was abuzz with workers

putting finishing touches on the \$10.2 million clinic constructed on the Sturgis Regional Hospital campus along Junction Avenue. The project added more than 20,000 square-feet to the existing hospital and replaced some 8,000 square-feet of existing specialty clinic space.

It also provides a new front entrance to the hospital and the emergency department, and more parking spaces.

About 23 years ago, Massa Berry Clinic (Regional Health Sturgis Clinic), 890 Lazelle St., Sturgis, was the first clinic to become part of the Regional Health system. With that partnership, local physicians stepped in to serve the hospital's 24/7 emergency room and work as the hospital's physicians. The new clinic was designed under a core model meaning there are two entrances to each exam room. One is for physicians and nurses, and the other is for patients.

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FILE PHOTO | THE SHERIDAN PRESS
Carol Bisbee, left, exchanges a high-five with celebrity fitness trainer Tony Horton at the conclusion of a community workout in 2015 at the Bruce Hoffman Golden Dome. Working out more regularly is a common resolution for folks of all ages.

Setting goals and resolutions

Here we are, 29 days into 2018. How are you doing with your New Year's resolutions?

Several Green House Living staff members reported that, thus far, their commitments to their resolutions have been strong.

"I'm not very organized," said Mary Grace Amende, a shabbaz (similar to a certified nursing assistant). She said she struggles with this as a busy mother who works full time. "I'm trying to just do a little at a time, and in the past several weeks, I think I'm doing well."

As a diabetic, Janice Gosch, RN, is striving to stay fit.

"I want to stay on top of my game with exercise," she said. Gosch prefers to walk outside and uses a recumbent bike when it is icy.

If you've had a few missteps on your path to keeping your resolution, it's not too late to revisit the goal and reinforce it. Ginny Rieger, occupational therapist and co-owner of Teton Therapy, said using "SMART" goals can help make you achieve your resolution. Rieger explained that SMART means specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time frame.

"Writing it down really helps so it sticks in your head and doesn't go to the wayside," Rieger said. "You need to have a plan for how you are going to accomplish it and how you will pay for it."

Are you what Rieger calls "a chronic

starter?" Do you set goals but never reach the finish line?

"Being patient with yourself is huge, understanding that you have to keep your eye on the prize, but it's OK if you don't hit the goal every single time," Rieger added.

As folks age, resolutions evolve.

Rieger explained that, for seniors, "many times the goal is to maintain their independence and stay as functional as they can be."

She likes to take into consideration both the patient's goal and the caregiver's goal.

When working with her senior clients, Rieger always collaborates with the person to determine the goal — what is important to the individual — and then writes it down. At each visit, the plan to meet the goal is reviewed. Rieger said this plan is specific about the kind of exercise and how many times it needs to be done weekly to reach the goal.

"It's a homework type of thing," she added. Rieger is there to help, but ultimately progress toward the goal is up to the individual.

While some prefer to have the start

of a new year — a clean slate — to set goals, Rieger said she is always setting personal goals. One of her goals is finding balance between having family, kids and a business to run. She has a bedtime goal of 10:30 p.m. and in the last year made a goal to eat out less as she is a convenience eater.

"My husband has helped me make weekly menus," she said.

Unlike the staff, Green House elders didn't seem to be particularly interested in making 2018 resolutions. When asked if she made a resolution this year, Millie Nelson, an elder at Green House's Watt Cottage, laughed.

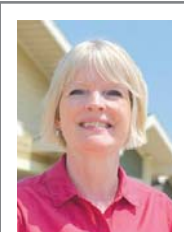
"No, I always break them so I don't bother to make them," she said. "I was always too nonchalant about them."

Millie explained if there was something she needed to do — like be consistent about taking her medication — she could make up her mind and be diligent about it. She didn't need to wait until the first of the year to make a resolution.

"I used to make resolutions," said Gladys Trott-Kamping, who resides at Green House's Whitney Cottage.

"Somehow life always had a way of interfering when you are raising kids," Trott-Kamping explained. "It's better not to have a resolution than to have one you have to kiss goodbye."

DEE STRAUSS is director at Green House Living for Sheridan.



DEE STRAUSS

SENIOR HAPPENINGS

- Inter-generational chess league through March 21, 6-7:30 p.m. Sign up at the YMCA at (307) 674-7488. Direct questions to Luke Gibson. Sponsored by the YMCA and The Hub.

- Ladies billiards? Any interested parties please call (307) 672-2240 ext. 107. Fridays at 1 p.m.; ages 50-plus, open to all abilities.

- Ukulele class with Lynn Young through March 14. Each Tuesday at 2:00 p.m. Learn basic chords, tuning and songs. No charge for classes. Limited instruments will be available for use on a temporary basis, courtesy of Q-Man Music. Instruments are also available for purchase through Q-man Music, CB Music or Morris Music in Sheridan. Sign-ups requested.

- Wally ball by request through March 20 on scheduled racquetball courts at the YMCA each Tuesday at 9 a.m. and/or Thursdays at 1:30 p.m. if we have interest. Please sign up at the Hub front desk for show of interest in either day. Question? Call (307) 672-2240 ex. 107. One dollar suggested donation at court time.

- The Yarn Shop is now accepting good, clean donations. Open to shoppers Mondays 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Wednesdays 9-11 a.m. and Thursdays 1-3 p.m.

- Valentine's portraits with or for your sweetheart Feb. 2. Schedule your setting between 10 a.m. and noon. Two 4x6-inch prints for \$5, courtesy of Shirley McPheeters of FFF Photography.

FUN AND FOOD
BUILD YOUR OWN SALAD
Mondays - Fridays
Entrees include sides, dessert and drink.

ENTRÉE CHOICE* or SOUP/SALAD

Tue- Pork Chop Supreme	
Wed- Chili/Mozzarella Cheese Stick	
Thu- Chicken Cordon Bleu	
Fri- Beef Pot Roast	*entrée only offered for Home Delivered Meals
Sat- Texas Hold 'em	
Sun- Turkey Roast	
Mon- Ham Penne skillet	

UPCOMING SPECIAL EVENTS
FEBRUARY IS NATIONAL HEART MONTH

Tue- Wallyball at the YMCA	9:00 a.m.	SC \$1.00, pay at Y
Wed- YMCA Chess Club	4:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m.	Café
Thurs - Toastmasters	6:45 a.m.	Community Room
Fri - Valentine Photos FFF Photography	10a.m. to 12p.m.	Community Room
Sat- Texas Hold 'em	12:30 to 3:00 p.m.	Café
Sun- SUPER BOWL PARTY	6:30 to 9:30 a.m.	Café

Lunch Service Hours: 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., 365 days a year at 211 Smith Street Home Delivered Meals (307) 672-6079

Loan Closet, Outreach, and Administration Services, 672-2240. Mondays - Fridays.

Help at Home Services, 675-1978. 232 North Brooks: Mondays - Fridays.

Day Break Adult Care Services, 674-4968. 241 Smith Street: Mondays - Fridays.