



# Republicans put spotlight on Obamacare critics in Georgia

BY STEVE NORDER

GAINESVILLE, Georgia Mon Nov 25, 2013 5:06pm EST

(Reuters) - Republicans went to the American South on Monday to press their opposition to President [Barack Obama's](#) signature healthcare law in a U.S. congressional hearing that the law's supporters called a one-sided political attack.

The hearing, chaired by Republican Representative Rob Woodall of Georgia, heard from witnesses picked by the panel's Republicans who said that the healthcare law - intended to help millions of uninsured and under-insured people get affordable medical insurance - actually will raise insurance costs and reduce coverage choices for many people in rural America.

Michael Boyette, a 28-year-old businessman from Ellijay, Georgia, said his insurance premium was increasing by almost \$200 per month for his family of three.

"You may think that we went with a more expensive plan or have gotten more coverage," Boyette said during the hearing, the second of four events on the Affordable Care Act to be held outside Washington by the Republican-led House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

"In fact, we have not," Boyette said. "We have less coverage than before, also higher out-of-pocket expense and a premium that has risen 65 percent. This is not affordable to me."

Supporters of the law, also known as Obamacare, complained that the hearing was merely the latest attempt by Republicans to denigrate it.

Carolyn Reed-Smith said she came from Spartanburg, South Carolina, hoping to speak about the benefits of Obamacare.

"They gave only one side of the story and were not looking for the other side," Reed-Smith said.

DeLane Adams, from the Atlanta area, had hoped to address the hearing to urge the lawmakers to press Georgia's Republican governor, Nathan Deal, to allow the expansion of the Medicaid health insurance program for the poor in the state as permitted under Obamacare. Deal, like some other Republican governors, has declined to do so.

"If this was a true hearing, they should let everyone speak on both sides," Adams said.

HealthCare.gov, the U.S. government's web portal for offering private health coverage to uninsured Americans in 36 of the 50 states under Obamacare, has been at the center of a political fire storm over technical problems that overwhelmed its October 1 launch and have dogged the system ever since.

In addition, insurance companies have canceled millions of existing insurance policies because they do not meet the law's standards for coverage even though Obama had promised that people happy with their insurance would be able to keep it.

#### 'STICKER SHOCK'

Woodall said during the hearing that many Americans are experiencing "sticker shock" as they face the cancellation of their current policies and seek new coverage under Obamacare.

Those new policies "cost more and cover less of those things that are most important to them," the congressman said. "Many more are learning that their doctor isn't available to them under their new, 'better' plan."

Another witness called by the panel, Raymer Sales Jr., who is with a Duluth, Georgia-based firm that works with employers to develop employee healthcare plans, spoke of rising costs.

"The insurance community has known from the very beginning that prices were expected to increase because of the required additional benefits," Sales said. "However, talking about the prospective increase in the cost of health insurance pales in comparison to showing someone real numbers."

The first of the committee's field hearings was last Friday in North Carolina. The panel's chairman, Representative Darrell Issa of California, attended that one but skipped Monday's hearing. Two more are set for Texas and Arizona next month.

The committee's top Democrat, Elijah Cummings of Maryland, last week called the hearings "a destructive political exercise" aimed at tearing down Obamacare.