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## NC legislators look at health care

By Gary D. Robertson

RALEIGH (AP) - Legislators heard and offered divergent perspectives March 18 on the federal health care overhaul's effectiveness in North Carolina as a new committee met and revisited debates in Raleigh on the Affordable Care Act.

House Speaker Thom Tillis, R-Mecklenburg, and Senate leader Phil Berger, R-Rockingham, created the 46-member committee to examine the effects the law's requirements were having on businesses, individual and group insurance markets, and health care services. Lawmakers have until the end of the year to make recommendations. "This is an education process," said Rep. Jim Fulghum, R-Wake, a committee co-chairman and retired surgeon. "We want to understand this as best we can."

Speaker Chris Conover of the Center for Health Policy and Inequalities Research at Duke University told the committee that the 2010 law should be repealed. He said it likely will reduce full-time employment in North Carolina as employers make potentially hundreds of thousands of workers part time to avoid providing affordable coverage.

The Affordable Care Act "has us moving literally in the wrong direction toward bigger government and handing far too much control over what used to be private decisions by patients and doctors, and handing these to the most dysfunctional part of American government," Conover told the committee.

Conover, who is also affiliated with conservative-leaning think tanks, warned against taking a second look at expanding Medicaid coverage, which Republican legislators and Gov. Pat McCrory refused to do last year and Democrats are urging to have reconsidered. He said the health overhaul law is too shaky financially to assume the federal government will continue to pay nearly all of the costs of covering more of the working poor in the years ahead.

The Kaiser Family Foundation calculated in the fall almost 320,000 people in North Carolina will miss out on the Medicaid expansion.

Already suspicious of Republican leaders who assembled the committee, Democrats in support of the health care law and Medicaid expansion held a news conference before the meeting to highlight the law's positives in North Carolina.

More than 200,000 state residents had enrolled in private coverage through the federally run health exchange by March 1, according to federal records, or more than half of those eligible to apply for a plan.

"We're finally going in the right direction getting our uninsured covered," said Rep. Verla Insko, D-Orange.

Those benefiting from the federal marketplace include small-business owner Retta Riordan, 61, of Apex. She was uninsured for 10 months last year, unable to get knee surgery. A torn meniscus made walking up the stairs a chore.

"I'm no longer living in fear of a catastrophic illness or injury," said Riordan, who got the surgery in January.

Some speakers also said GOP legislative leaders and McCrory were to blame for much of the poor rollout by refusing to create North Carolina's own online insurance exchange, relying instead on the overloaded federal marketplace.

"Not expanding Medicaid is a tragedy," added Dr. Susan Eder, a psychiatrist in Raleigh. McCrory and GOP leaders said in 2013 it didn't make sense to expand Medicaid because the state's program was struggling with large shortfalls, and the state wouldn't have much real control over a health exchange.

Insko and Rep. Beverly Earle, D-Mecklenburg, predicted earlier Tuesday the panel likely would only provide talking points for Republicans in the fall elections. Tillis is also running for the U.S. Senate.

The GOP-led legislature approved a bill in 2011 directing the state to join a legal challenge to the federal law, but then-Gov. Beverly Perdue vetoed the bill.

The health care law is expected to place additional burdens on state agencies. The health insurance plan for current and retired state employees and teachers, as well as their dependents, projects requirements of the law will make up 2 percent of its overall expenses during the 2014-15 fiscal year, or \$59 million, according to a committee presentation.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina, the state's largest health insurer with 3.8 million members, is one of only two insurers providing plans to state residents on the health care exchange.

Blue Cross is concerned about preliminary figures showing a disproportionate percentage of insurance exchange applicants from ages 45 to 64 and high utilization levels of certain services, company lobbyist Mark Fleming told the committee. Insurers are counting on younger, healthier residents to buy insurance to counter the costs of older, sicker subscribers.



First Lady Michelle Obama plays ping pong with students while touring the Beijing Normal School in Beijing, China, March 21, 2014. (Official White House Photo by Amanda Lucidon)

## Parents of Hadiya Pendleton 'Still Mourning'

By Jazelle Hunt  
NNPA National Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - After a long day of travelling, then networking on Capitol Hill, Nathaniel and Cleopatra Pendleton returned to their downtown Washington, D.C. hotel and dressed for a dinner in their honor. Later that evening, they shook hands and smiled for photographs as they accepted the 2014 NNPA Newsmaker of the Year Award, an accolade they earned as a result of their work against gun violence in the aftermath of their 15-year-old daughter's death. They shared the honor with the parents of Jordan Davis, a Black teen killed in Jacksonville, Fla.

"We are mourning still. We still wake up every day and have to determine what to do, whether what we're doing is right for us," Cleopatra says. "So many people want to see something positive come from this, a lot of people came to us and said we need to do something. They empowered us."

Not as much as the parents have empowered Black America.

On January 29, 2013 their daughter, Hadiya Pendleton, went to the park with friends to enjoy an unseasonably warm Chicago afternoon after a day of final exams. There, her life was taken by a pair of gang-affiliated young men not much older than she, who fired into the group of teens sheltering from a passing rain after mistaking one of them for a rival gang member. Hadiya was hit in the back and passed away in the arms of two friends.

For months afterward, her name was emblazoned in headlines, sometimes with a days-old photo of her performing in President Barack Obama's second Inaugural Parade. Other times, the headlines accompanied a video of her parents, evenly imploring the nation to honor Hadiya and other victims by passing common-sense gun laws. Hadiya's death was the last of 44 homicides that month in Chicago.

## Va. historic marker to recognize divinity school

PETERSBURG, Va. (AP) - A Petersburg school that prepared black men for the ministry is being recognized with a Virginia historical marker.

The marker honoring the Bishop Payne Divinity School will be dedicated on March 29. The school was established in 1878 at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church Normal and Industrial School.

The divinity school was started by the Rev. John Payne, the first bishop of Liberia. Its graduates included James Solomon Russell, who founded St. Paul's College in Lawrenceville.

Bishop Payne Divinity School merged in 1949 with the Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria. The sign was approved this month by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

The sign will be dedicated at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Petersburg.



Nathaniel A. Pendleton, Sr., father of Hadiya Pendleton, speaks about daughter's death as his wife, Cleopatra, looks on (NNPA Photo by Roy Lewis).

In the Black community, gun violence is horrifyingly common. Homicide is the number-one cause of death for Black males ages 15 to 34, according to 2010 data collected by the Centers for Disease Control. Between 2008 and 2009, Black teenage boys were eight times as likely to die (and 25 times as likely to be injured) at the barrel of a gun than White teen boys.

Globally, a report released last year by the Institutes of Medicine and the National Research Council finds that the rate of firearm-related homicide is 19.5 times higher than the rates in other industrialized countries.

"Sometimes a person that's just interested [in reducing gun violence] can be a little more insensitive without knowing they are. (Continued On Page 2)

## Winston-Salem State chancellor to step down

WINSTON-SALEM (AP) - Donald Reaves says he will step down as chancellor of Winston-Salem State University after more than seven years leading the school.

But Reaves isn't leaving the historically black college. He says he will join the school's faculty as a political science professor with full tenure.

Reaves says he plans on stepping down as the school's leader at the end of 2014, but will stay on if his successor has not been found by then.

Reaves says he has accomplished what he wanted to do at Winston-Salem State like improving student retention and graduation rates even though the state cut its funding for higher education.

He also says he only planned to stay five years when he was hired in August 2007.

## Leader of El Paso desegregation effort dies at 94

EL PASO, Texas (AP) - A graveside service is scheduled for Monday for Albert Schwartz, a former El Paso department store executive who led an effort that made El Paso the first city in the old Confederacy to end segregation in public accommodations.

Bob Brannon, husband to Schwartz niece Edi Schwartz Brannon, says the 94-year-old former president of The Popular department store died at his El Paso home Friday after a long illness.

The El Paso Times (<http://bit.ly/1kVDBxA>) reports The Popular closed in 1995 after 93 years in business.

Schwartz was with the 104th Infantry Division when it entered Germany's Nordhausen concentration camp in 1945 and was confronted by more than 3,000 corpses and 750 starving survivors.

In 1959, he led an Anti-Defamation League effort that led to a 1962 city ordinance ending racial segregation.