

Gillibrand, Maloney, Quinn, Gloria Steinem and Dozens of Women Leaders Join Together to Protest Anti-Choice Stupak Amendment in Health Reform Bill

GILLIBRAND: "Without Proper Coverage, These Women Will Be Forced to Return to Dangerous Back Alley Providers"

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New York, NY - With the U.S. Senate set to begin debate on health care reform this week, U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand was joined today by dozens of women leaders to protest Michigan Democratic Representative Bart Stupak's amendment which passed the House of Representatives this month and would deny millions of women access to reproductive care. Doctors, businesswomen, teachers, public health experts, city, state, and federal elected officials and pro-choice leaders from NARAL, Planned Parenthood and others gathered to denounce the discriminatory and dangerous anti-choice provision, which would effectively prevent women from purchasing reproductive insurance with their own money and put the health of millions of women and young girls at grave risk.

"A lack of access to full reproductive health care puts the lives of women and girls at grave risk," said Senator Gillibrand. "This anti-choice measure poses greater restriction on low-income women and those who are more likely to receive some kind of subsidy and less likely to be able to afford a supplemental insurance policy. Denying low-income women reproductive coverage in this way is discriminatory and dangerous. Without proper coverage, women will be forced to postpone care, while attempting to find the money they need to pay for it. Or these women will be forced to return to dangerous, back alley providers. Women and girls deserve better."

The Stupak-Pitts amendment will effectively prohibit private insurance companies offering coverage through the proposed federal health care exchange from covering abortion services, even for women buying insurance with their own money. This dangerous and drastic change to existing law would force insurance companies that currently provide abortion coverage to choose between continuing that coverage or dropping it for all women if they want to participate in health insurance exchanges.

In doing so, it is the first restriction on women purchasing insurance with their own dollars. This measure reaches far beyond the so-called Hyde Amendment, which bans the use of federal dollars to pay for almost all abortions in a number of government programs.

The effect of the Stupak-Pitts amendment would require women to purchase a separate "abortion rider." However, in the five states that only allow abortion coverage through a separate rider, it's nearly impossible to find such a private insurance policy. In one state, North Dakota, one insurance company holds 91 percent of the state's health insurance market and refuses to even offer such a rider. Further, it would require women to essentially plan for an event that occurs in the most unplanned and sometimes emergency situations.

According to estimates, the new exchange would offer coverage to many of the 17 million women ages 18-64 who are uninsured, and would be a source of coverage for the 5.7 million women who are now purchasing coverage in the individual market. Small employers (with fewer than 100 employees) are also likely to move to the exchange for more affordable options. For those women who presently have health care coverage that includes reproductive care, they would lose that coverage under the Stupak-Pitts amendment.

Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney said, "The Stupak amendment isn't just about federal funds going to abortion. This isn't the Hyde amendment, which bans taxpayer dollars from funding abortions. This goes way beyond that - further than any current federal law. The Stupak amendment would prevent women who are using their own money from being able to buy through the new insurance exchanges a policy that covers abortions, although currently nearly 90% of private insurance policies provide such coverage. It threatens women's health and it's very bad policy."

Congresswoman Yvette Clarke said, "The Stupak Amendment radically undermines women's rights. As it currently stands, the amendment bars the use of federally funded insurance plans to cover abortions. The amendment limits the opportunity to purchase coverage for the procedure, diminishing rights for all women, even those who do not receive any subsidies from the government. Supporters of the amendment have stated that women could purchase separate coverage to cover the procedure, but this is not a practical option. Most people do not have the foresight to know if they will ever be in a situation that requires such a procedure. Also, purchasing additional coverage costs money - money that many women in my constituency do not have! The Stupak Amendment should not be supported. This amendment adversely impacts a woman's legal right to choose and threatens the progress that has been made since *Roe v. Wade*."

Congresswoman Nita Lowey said, "The Stupak Amendment is an unacceptable and draconian restriction on the right of women to make their own health care decisions and goes far beyond the status quo of prohibiting taxpayer funding for abortions. The fact that anti-choice extremists demanded its inclusion at the 11th hour as the price of health insurance reform makes it even more outrageous. The Senate must reject the Stupak Amendment, and I will fight to ensure it is not included in the final legislation."

Congresswoman Nydia M. Velázquez said, "Health care reform can not come at the expense of women's rights. We are working to eradicate years of discrimination and inequity in our health care system, not create new restrictions that hurt working women and prevent them from purchasing coverage with their own money."

New York City Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum said, "The Stupak amendment is a gross insult to women, advocates for choice, and voters who support health reform. We cannot allow women's rights to be sacrificed for political gain."

Assemblymember Deborah Glick said, "This disgraceful attack on women and their private health care choices reflects a complete lack of understanding that abortion is not a planned event, but rather a reaction to an unplanned circumstance; either an unplanned and unwanted pregnancy, or a pregnancy that has gone horribly wrong."

Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) President Cecile Richards said, "The Stupak amendment restricts abortion coverage by private health insurance plans in an unprecedented and dangerous manner. Women in this country are not going to stand for the government making personal medical decisions about what's best for them and their families or dictating what kind of health insurance they can buy. It's not what the American people want."

Kelli Conlin, President of NARAL Pro-Choice New York said, "The House's passage of the unconscionable Stupak-Pitts amendment is a powerful wake-up call to women. We were promised time and again that nobody would lose their existing coverage under health care reform. But this amendment takes that promise and turns it into a lie -- because a women who currently has abortion coverage and joins the exchange will simply not have access to that same plan. That is a loss, and it is not acceptable. We stand together today to say that we will not see our rights weakened under health care reform."

Led by feminist activist icon Gloria Steinem, the following leaders gathered to speak out for the need to prevent the Stupak amendment from becoming a part of the final health care reform package that will be passed by Congress:

Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, Councilwoman Jessica Lappin, Cecile Richards (President of Planned Parenthood Federation

of America), **Kelli Conlin** (President of NARAL Pro-Choice NY), **Lillian Rodríguez López** (President of the Hispanic Federation), **Dr. Holly Atkinson** (health and human rights activist), **Sonia Ossorio** (President of National Organization for Women-NYC), **Donna Lieberman** (Executive Director of New York Civil Liberties Union), **Cathy Lasry** (President of the Eleanor R. Legacy Committee) **Ilene Lang** (President of Catalyst), **Irasema Gaza** (President of Legal Momentum), **Dina Bakst** (Co-President of A Better Balance), District Leader Cynthia Doty, District Leader Pam Elam, District Leader Joan Paylo plus reps from American Heart and Stoke Association, CARE, HBC Investments, League of Women Voters, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer's office, National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health, New York ChoicePAC, New York Women's Agenda, Raising Women's Voices, United Federation of Teachers and Center for Reproductive Rights.