



February Recess Toolkit Defending against ACA repeal

House Speaker Paul Ryan recently announced that the 2017 budget reconciliation process, which Republicans plan to use as a vehicle for repeal of key provisions of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), will stretch into late February or early March. This extended timeline is certainly a sign that we are being effective, but also that we need to think creatively and strategically about the best ways to keep the campaign momentum up in the weeks and months ahead. It also makes February Congressional recess, which runs from February 18 through February 26, a uniquely critical time for broad, coordinated action across the country.

When planning for February recess, it's important to keep in mind: 1) your current capacity, including available resources, grassroots reach, and staffing; 2) your state's political environment; and 3) the style and intensity of the message you are sending to your members of Congress and to the public. The following is a list of suggested activities offering a range of options based on these measures to help you think through your plans for February recess.

What can advocates do?

Communications activities:

- *Social media* – Creating Facebook, Instagram or Twitter posts on either your personal or organization's account are quick and easy ways to make your voice heard. If you want to engage with others or start a broader digital conversation, consider having your organization host a Twitter chat, or a Thunderclap so that a particular message can be shared widely and simply. Many advocates are using the hashtag #ProtectOurCare to plug into the broader conversation and amplify their messages.
- *Print media outreach* – We strongly encourage you to focus your efforts on placing Letters to the Editor and OpEds in your state's local newspapers. Community papers are a great target because they are more likely to print your letters and are always read by Members of Congress and their staff.
 - This [Op-Ed and LTE Framework](#) document will walk you through the process.
 - Here are some examples from states across the country:
 - **Juneau Empire:** [Letter: No ACA repeal without replacement](#)
 - **Portland Press Herald:** [Commentary: The Affordable Care Act Saves Lives](#)
 - **Payson Roundup:** [Opinion: How Many Will Die?](#)
 - **Knoxville News Sentinel:** [GOP Should Follow Alexander's lead on ACA Reform](#)
 - **The Tennessean:** [Tennessee Should Focus on State-based Medicaid Expansion](#)

- *Story placement in local media* – It is a good idea to pitch local stories to the media. Identify key themes and/or opinions of editorial pages to get a feel for which writers are most worth your time. Also, consider using volunteers and coalition partners to collect stories of individuals and families around the state who have benefitted from the ACA, and then work with your trusted media sources to place these stories in articles and other features.
- *Letter-writing to members of Congress* – Hosting letter-writing campaigns to Members of Congress can also be an easy way to engage their constituents and make your voice heard. Provide talking points or sample language tailored to the specific member of Congress receiving the letters.
- *Call-in days* – Schedule a day on which you ask partners and grassroots supporters to call your state’s Congressional offices and express concern about repeal of the ACA. You can create a short script using the latest talking points and provide the phone numbers, making this an easy task for people with a range of experience in advocacy.
- *Petitions* - In the same way that you can organize call-in days, you can recruit a number of ACA supporters to sign petitions using email and social media. These petitions can be printed out and signed in person, or hosted on various websites like www.change.org.

Events:

- *Attend public meetings* – If legislators are planning public events in your region, it is critical that constituents attend town hall meetings and public forums to voice their support for the ACA. Attendees can ask members of Congress the following questions to get them on the record regarding potential replacement plans:
 - Will the 20 million Americans who gained coverage under ACA be able to keep their plans?
 - Will the law protect older adults, women, and people who have pre-existing conditions by preventing insurance companies from locking them out of plans or charging them unaffordable premiums?
 - Will families get help paying premiums based on what they can afford, so that lower income families get more help than wealthy Americans?
 - Will the plan address families’ number one concern: lowering deductibles and other out-of-pocket costs? And will it ensure coverage for essential services like maternity care, prescription drugs, and no-cost preventive services?
 - Will the plan maintain or increase current investments in states’ Medicaid programs so our state can continue providing affordable coverage to low-income families, children, people living with disabilities and seniors and continue to invest in quality improvements and innovative delivery systems?
- *Direct outreach with members* – While your legislators are home, schedule in-district meetings. Organize a diverse group of stakeholders, including local health professionals, community leaders, small business owners, clergy members and health care consumers who can share their stories.

- *Plan your own public events* – The type of event will depend on the time and capacity available, the best way to reach a particular member of Congress, and the number of people participating. Some possibilities for an event include:
 - Tour of a clinic or hospital
 - Public rally
 - March
 - Town hall meeting
 - Open house or reception at your organization

- *Birddogging* - While it can take different forms, birddogging typically includes organizers following, observing or recording public officials at various events. This is a tactic that is used often in political campaigns, but can be adapted to get members of Congress on the record on policy issues as well. The goal is often to provoke a response or candid moment that can then be used later in broadcast or social media.

- *Civil disobedience events* – Civil disobedience events can run the full spectrum from one or two-person actions to large groups, and may also vary widely in terms of impact and notoriety. Effective events can include sit-ins, Lives on the Line, flashmobs, protests and more disruptive events. Be sure to consider the potential impact and consequences of the various tactics involved.