Mr. Kinney's sacrifice and dedication to our country are an inspiration to us all. He is a man who defended our country at a time of tremendous need. I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring his service, bravery, and dedication to his family and community.

ASTORIA REGATTA

HON. SUZANNE BONAMICI
OF OREGON
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 25, 2019

Ms. BONAMICI. Madam Speaker, I rise to congratulate the Astoria Regatta, the City of Astoria, and Clatsop County on the 125th celebration of the Regatta. This is a joyous milestone for one of the oldest festivals west of the Rocky Mountains and an important moment to pause and reflect on the significance of the Regatta to our region.

Since the Astoria Regatta's founding in 1894, it has celebrated our connection to the mighty Columbia River and our heritage as a seafaring and fishing community. The first festival, which evolved out of the custom of boat racing on the river, included a parade of 22 decorated yachts and the presence of the U.S. Monitor Monterey. Early Regattas featured a four-and-a-half mile swim across the river and the popular Salmon Derby. Since then, the Regatta has grown with the additions of the Regatta Court, the Grand Land Parade, the Seaman's Memorial, the rose planting ceremony, and many other special community traditions.

Today, the Astoria Regatta embodies the best aspects of our region. Through the Royal Court, the Regatta helps develop the leadership skills of young women. The Regatta is also an opportunity to praise the dedication of community leaders who serve as Regatta Dignitaries: the Admiral, Admiral's Aide, and the Grand Marshals. And through the Seaman's Memorial, the rose planting ceremony, and many other special community traditions.

Although World War I and World War II interrupted the celebration of the Astoria Regatta, the community always found a way to restore it. In fact, many of our long-standing community institutions have ties to the Regatta. The Astoria Yacht Club, founded in 1894, has been a key player in the Astoria community and memorializes those we have lost on the river and the ocean.

The only remaining question a reasonable observer might ask is why has repeal taken so long? Given the initial 5-year delay in the tax's effective date in 2010, based on Speaker Nancy Pelosi's opposition and the two subsequent delays until 2022, it is true that the warning flags were up on this tax early and Congress should have acted sooner. In the Congresses that followed 2010 ACA enactment, there was ample opportunity to get this done. In the 114th Congress an identical surgical repeal bill had 188 bipartisan cosponsors. In the 115th Congress a surgical bill had 36 bipartisan cosponsors. Despite that broad-based support, neither Speaker John Boehner nor Paul Ryan ever called those bills up for a vote. I know because I was the lead Democratic sponsor on every one of those measures.

Mr. COURTNEY. Madam Speaker, I would like to thank Chairman NEAL for his leadership managing this bill on the floor. As Chair of the Ways and Means Committee, his advocacy is a powerful message to the President to pass the Middle Class Health Benefits Tax Repeal Act. I also want to thank Ranking Member BRADY and Rep. MIKE KELLY for their bipartisan efforts in support of this bill, defying the polarized politics that far too often dominates the health care debate.

Madam Speaker, this bill today comes with the support of a more than 650 health care stakeholders who, over the last ten years, have joined together to repeal the 40 percent excise tax on higher premium health plans scheduled to go into effect in 2022. This tax was a late add on to the Affordable Care Act and has been rattling around in the federal tax code ever since, never having actually collected a penny of revenue, but nonetheless casting an enormous shadow over 180 million Americans' health plans—we know in real life from HR administrators and employee representatives it has added pressure to shift coverage into higher deductible health plans. As the Commonwealth Fund recently reported, the number of Americans who are underinsured as the result of high deductibles has grown by over 50 percent since 2005. Kaiser Family Foundation just reported that 31 percent of employer health plans will get hit by the tax in 2022, and that number will grow sharply soon after. Passage of this bill will stop that trend from worsening, lift the shadow that overhangs employer-sponsored plans, and give millions of teachers, factory workers, small businesses, firefighters and the like, relief.

As the bill's lead sponsor, I want to foot-stomp the fact that repeal of the tax does not touch the architecture of the ACA's patient protections. Repeal is completely severable from the other 440 sections of the law and leaves intact employer health benefits, and the elimination of preexisting conditions exclusions and lifetime caps to name a few. Given that those patient protections have been in full operation for the last ten years, while this “zombie tax” has been in a coma during that time, it is abundantly clear that the tax is disconnected from the rest of the law. Lastly, I want to underscore the CBO determination that passage will not result in any increase in the number of uninsured.

There is one other concern that observers have raised, namely the impact on the national debt. Again, JCT has given a mixed report. The good news is that repeal this year 2019 will result in no budget impact in 2020 and 2021. In the following two years they estimate a loss of 21 billion in tax revenue. In the out years their projections grow exponentially, based on a theory of “wage effect” cause by the “thinning” of health plans’ value and a corresponding increase in wages. To say that the “wage effect” theory is debatable is an understatement, and employers groups such as USW and NAM have been vociferous in dismissing the validity of the “wage effect” based on their real experience at the collective bargaining table.