TMC’s forum on federal health reform draws big crowd, mostly of opponents
By Stephanie Innes Arizona Daily Star | June 26, 2017


The turnout at Tucson Medical Center’s forum about federal health reform Monday night underscored local concern about the issue — there were 700 people, twice what organizers expected.

A livestream of the event on Facebook drew 1,900, organizers added.

“I’m floored,” TMC spokesman Jim Marten said of the attendance numbers. “With the heat and everything. ... We had to keep adding chairs.”

Here are five takeaways from the event:

1. The sentiment at the forum was against both the Senate and House bills.

Judy Rich, CEO of TMC, made it clear at the beginning of the program that she thinks the American Health Care Act (House bill) and the Better Care Reconciliation Act (Senate bill) should be set aside, and that efforts should be made to move to a bipartisan solution that will be better for communities.

The audience members were also predominantly either concerned about both bills or had made up their minds against them. A group greeted attendees with information about a single-payer “Medicare for All” alternative. One woman held a sign that said “Healthcare Not Wealthcare.”
2. The opposition was not solely partisan.
Dr. Dan Derksen, a health-policy expert and professor at the University of Arizona’s Mel & Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health, pointed out impacts that both bills could have, particularly on Arizona’s rural and low-income populations. He said they would be devastating and, after the event, called the proposals “too vindictive.”

But he also disclosed to audience members that he is a lifelong registered Republican.

3. The Senate bill is not too different from the House bill.
Under both bills, Medicaid as we know it could end. And congressional budget reports on both bills predict that under their provisions, more Americans will be uninsured.

Sharp cuts in federal funding could double the number of uninsured in Arizona to about 1.2 million people, Derksen said. When people are uninsured, it shifts costs to individuals, families and health providers, and also worsens health outcomes, he said.

The Affordable Care Act passed under President Obama was “fundamental landmark” legislation in many ways, said Dr. Francisco Garcia, who is assistant county administrator for health services and chief medical officer for Pima County. “To me it was like the Berlin Wall coming down and apartheid ending,” he said.

“Access to care and access to insurance doesn’t necessarily mean people are healthier and getting better, but it is a fundamental requisite, a kind of component of health and wellbeing.”