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Sen. Landrieu quotes Mark Twain in decrying 'misinformation' about Obamacare



Sen. Mary Landrieu Tuesday defended the Affordable Care Act during a hearing on small business implementation of the new health law. (U.S. Senate photo)



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WASHINGTON - At a contentious hearing of her Senate Small Business Committee, Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., offered up a spirited defense Wednesday of the Affordable Care Act, while acknowledging problems that she says require bipartisan fixes.

Landrieu said the law's problems have been well documented, particularly with the unresponsiveness of the on-line marketplace, but other aspects of the law are working, particularly to help small businesses.

Yet, Landrieu said, critics are assailing the law at every opportunity, spreading misinformation, and seeking its repeal. She quoted Mark Twain. "A lie can travel half way around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes."

She invited business officials, and representatives of state governments to testify who spoke about the law's successes and challenges.

Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho, the top Republican on the Small Business Committee, said she admired Landrieu's courage, particularly for acknowledging her role in helping develop provisions of the Affordable Care Act related to small business,

Soon, he said, it is going to be as tough finding people admitting some role in the law's creation as it is to "find people who admitted voting for Richard Nixon."

"This has been a catastrophic failure across America," Risch said. He downplayed the testimony from people who said the law is helping them, saying that anytime "you throw billions of dollars at a problem you're bound to have a few successes."

Landrieu began the hearing by talking about what led to the creation of the 2010 Affordable Care Act - people losing coverage if a family member got sick, large annual increases in premiums well beyond inflation, and small businesses unable to find affordable insurance for employees, particularly if a workers' family member contracted a serious disease like cancer.

She said the law is working well in many of the states whose governors have decided to implement their own exchanges and marketplaces to help small businesses and their workers find affordable coverage. "

Other governors, "including mine," referring to Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, chose not to develop state exchanges and rely on the federal government to set up the system. Some "did nothing to help," Landrieu said and "it is no wonder some of them (exchanges) are not working."

The Jindal administration said the health care law is bad policy and that the state therefore decided not to create its own exchange.

In New Mexico, the state-run small business exchange is working, physician Martin Hickey told the committee.

"I did it for my family last week and it was like going down a water slide," Hickey said. "There is even a calculator to help an employee choose the right plan based on generalized use of health care in the past."

But David Allen, president and CEO of Flatirons Practice Management, a Colorado medical billing firm, said the new health law is producing nothing but frustration.

After multiple failed attempts to access the system, Allen said, he found that he could get an affordable policy for his employees by going to a higher deductible plan - something he said he could have done on his own without the Affordable Care Act.

Landrieu, who is running for re-election next year, is facing a second round of ads critical of her support from the secretive conservative advocacy group, Americans for Prosperity (AFP).

The group is largely funded by the conservative billionaire Koch brothers, but it has not responded to questions about who is funding this current advertising campaign.

"Some politicians are scrambling to distance themselves from Obamacare," says AFP President Tim Phillips. "But people are hurting. They're losing their doctor, seeing the plan they liked stripped away from them, seeing prices go up and their options dwindle."

Landrieu has introduced legislation that would allow Americans who want to keep their plans to do so - even if they don't meet the minimum benefits standards of the Affordable Care Act. But unlike GOP bills with the same provision, Landrieu's bill requires the companies to let people know if the plans don't meet the benefits requirements of the Affordable Care Act and also let them know that they might find better coverage at an affordable price from the law's exchanges.

At the hearing, Landrieu continued to call on Republicans to work with Democrats to make the law work. It should be "fixed, not repealed," Landrieu said.

Drew Greenblatt, president and owner of [Marlin Steel Wire Products LLC in Baltimore](#), said he's having major problems with the law, but agreed with Landrieu that the emphasis should be on fixing the flaws. He was speaking on behalf of the National Association of Manufacturers.

"I am well aware that the Affordable Care Act is law and it is not going to go away or change without bipartisan legislation," Greenblatt said. "On behalf of the NAM, I urge members of Congress and the Senate on both sides of the aisle to take an honest look at all health laws that are not working, this one included, and fix them."

Marianne O'Brien Markowitz, regional administrator for the Small Business Administration, said that she continues to meet with small business owners across America who are surprised to learn that if they employ fewer than 50 workers they are not mandated to provide coverage to their workers. All part, Landrieu suggested, of the "intentional" misinformation campaign.

Sen. David Vitter, R-La., asked Mila Kofman, head of the Washington D.C. small business exchange, whether any other large employers, besides Congress, are able to purchase insurance through the exchange.

Kofman said the plan is limited to businesses with fewer than 50 workers -- so her answer is that Congress is unique. But it's function of the Affordable Care Act that requires members of Congress and most of their employees to purchase coverage from the Washington D.C. small business exchange, she said.

Vitter said it amounted to special treatment for Congress.

Landrieu cut off Vitter's questioning, saying he had exceeded the five-minute time limit. She said under Vitter's legislation, congressional staffers would be the only government workers denied a government contribution toward their health coverage. Vitter responded that he didn't come close to the 25 minutes Landrieu received for her opening statement.

http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2013/11/sen_landrieu_quotes_mark_twain.html

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