

# Local clergy: 'Immoral' to repeal Obamacare without substitute ready

ANNE SAKER

ASAKER@ENQUIRER.COM

Local religious leaders, mourning the U.S. Senate's action Thursday on the Affordable Care Act, called on local citizens to agitate against an "irresponsible" and "immoral" decision to repeal the health-care law without having a substitute plan ready to go.

The Rev. Damon Lynch Jr., pastor of New Jerusalem Baptist Church in Carthage, scolded Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, for his vote in the early hours of Thursday to begin the ACA's rollback. Lynch, a respected clergyman in Cincinnati, said he has worked with Portman for decades on civic projects. Lynch said he is disappointed.

"Rob Portman knew I would not be pleased," Lynch told a news conference at the Norwood offices of Interact for Health, a major health nonprofit in the region. "I have already been invited to the national prayer breakfast next month, but I am not going. I've told him, I would go if I were allowed to speak. At that prayer breakfast, somebody needs to say something about this travesty that's been done in America."

Rabbi Margaret Meyer, president of the Metropolitan Area Religious Coalition of Cincinnati, said the repeal signaled a moral quandary for Americans.

"My tradition teaches, and I'm sure others do, too, that health care is one of the most important services that a society must provide," he said. "It is irresponsible and I believe immoral for our elected representatives to vote to repeal the Affordable Care Act without a substitute plan ready to be in place."

Lynch called on families who may

gather to celebrate Monday's Martin Luther King Jr. holiday to call their members of Congress about the repeal.

More than 700,000 Ohioans have either purchased health insurance through the ACA's marketplace or were placed under the umbrella of Medicaid, which the law expanded. Critics of the law, including Portman, complain that the law triggered increases in policy premiums and forced patients to find new doctors.

Early Thursday, the Senate voted 51-48 on a budget blueprint that would allow the law to be gutted without a filibuster. In a statement, Portman said he is "committed to working with my colleagues to ensure we enact a smart, responsible plan to replace Obamacare as quickly as possible." Portman's office had no details on such a plan.

Thursday's news conference at Interact for Health was arranged by the nonprofits Universal Health Care Action Network-Ohio and Progress-Ohio. The left-leaning Columbus think tank Policy Matters Ohio issued a report this week that found, "Medicaid expansion was especially important for white men in Ohio."

The report said that of everyone who enrolled in Medicaid under the expansion, 71.5 percent were white, 55.8 percent were male, 58.1 percent had a high school diploma or less education, and 43 percent were employed.

"This group had higher blood pressure and cholesterol and higher levels of chronic disease than patients that had previously been on Medicaid, a sign that they were acutely in need of access to health care," the report said.