

# Obamacare Supporters Dog Maine Republican in Boston for Voting To Repeal It

By **State House News Service** | June 19, 2017, 20:33 EDT

Printed from: <http://newbostonpost.com/2017/06/19/obamacare-supporters-dog-maine-republican-in-boston-for-voting-to-repeal-it/>



Sam Portera, an organizer with Maine People’s Alliance, addressed protesters outside the Hampshire House in Boston on Monday, June 19 where Congressman Bruce Poliquin of Maine had an event with the New England Council. [Photo: Andy Metzger/SHNS]



By Andy Metzger

STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

BOSTON — Anger at a Maine Republican congressman spilled onto the streets of Boston on Monday where constituents claimed their representative has ignored them in voting for a repeal of the Affordable Care Act.

U.S. Representative Bruce Poliquin, who represents the vast north of the state, is so far the only New Englander in Congress to vote in favor of the American Health Care Act, a reform bill that analysts say would increase the number of uninsured and reduce the federal deficit.

Maine Democrats who turned up outside the Hampshire House on Monday morning claimed that Poliquin had not held any town hall-type meetings where he could hear from constituents. An aide to the congressman described the event as a “political stunt.”

“I’m here in Boston today because for some reason Poliquin is here instead of doing his job and fighting for the people he represents in Maine,” said Melissa Stevens, a Lewiston Maine resident who said she relies on Maine Medicaid to care for her and her two children. “I shouldn’t have to travel 130 miles to remind my representative that he represents me. You should be ashamed of yourself. We will remember in November.”

Poliquin was at the Hampshire House on Beacon Street for a breakfast event with the New England Council, a business group. Protesters claimed he was also raising money in Boston. His congressional office was not able to address whether he was fund raising.

In a statement Poliquin said he voted for the health reform bill to move it to the U.S. Senate, where he hoped it would receive some improvements.

“I hope it comes back stronger and better. This simply moves this issue on to the Senate,” Poliquin said in a statement about his vote. “ObamaCare is failing, and Congress must act to rescue American families.”

In addition to the Mainers who said they drove south early Monday morning, some like-minded Massachusetts activists turned out at the rally organized by Health Care For All, Community Catalyst and the Maine People’s Alliance.

“When people who live in Maine can’t talk to their own people, that’s crazy,” said Kathleen Paul, of Massachusetts Senior Action Council. She said that if the Affordable Care Act is repealed “people are going to die.”

“You just might as well dig a hole and climb into it,” the Lynn resident told the News Service.

Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker, a Republican, has bucked his

party’s congressional leadership, and has sought to mobilize fellow governors in opposition to the bill.

Baker traveled to Washington D.C. on Friday to tell Senate staffers about his concerns, and he signed onto a bipartisan letter with six other governors the same day saying the legislation “calls into question coverage for the vulnerable and fails to provide the necessary resources to ensure that no one is left out, while shifting significant costs to the states.

“Medicaid provisions included in this bill are particularly problematic,” the letter continued. “Instead, we recommend Congress address factors we can all agree need fixing.”

Ohio Governor John Kasich, Montana Governor Steve Bullock, Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval, Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards, Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper, and Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf also signed onto the letter.

“Baker’s been great. We’ve sent huge thank you cards to Baker,” said Bill Henning, director of the Boston Center for Independent Living.

Protesters on Monday filled a small area of sidewalk and used a bullhorn at a wooden podium.

“This is a ridiculous political stunt organized by extreme, liberal organizations,” Brendan Conley, a spokesman for the congressman, said in a statement. “It is astonishing that State House News Service would find this political stunt remotely newsworthy.”

Larry Gilbert, the former mayor of Lewiston, called Poliquin’s cellphone on the sidewalk, telling the News Service he never hears back from the congressman.

“Where are you? Are you still hiding in a ladies restroom down in Washington?” Gilbert asked on the voicemail. He said, “As a result of your vote in Congress people are going to die.”

Gilbert was referencing an incident where ahead of the health care vote, a reporter for Slate asked Poliquin if he had made up his mind about the bill.

“He said nothing and made a beeline to the restroom,” the Slate reporter wrote. “Unfortunately it was the door to the women’s restroom that he had first run to, so he corrected himself and went into the men’s room.”

Sam Portera, a Maine’s People’s Alliance organizer from Bangor, mentioned two potential candidates to challenge Poliquin — Phil Cleaves and Jonathan Fulford — and he said he expects others, too.

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