McEntee: GOP turns nasty on Affordable Care Act

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The headline is the essence of class: “Confirmed: Matheson’s Healthcare Takeover is a ‘Big F***ing’ Tax.”

Must have been a yuckfest for the National Republican Congressional Committee, which sent out similar releases claiming Democratic representatives across the country purportedly voted for the Affordable Care Act two years ago.

Very funny. Trouble is, Rep. Jim Matheson, D-Utah, and 33 other representatives voted against the bill in 2010, feeling it was, among other things, too expensive.

Such is the toxic tone as lawmakers and the rest of us digest the meaning of the ACA. Mitt Romney and fellow Republicans are vowing to repeal the law as soon as Romney wins the presidency; his supporters contributed nearly $5 million in donations within the 24 hours after the ruling.

For the record, I checked the National Democratic Congressional Committee, which was critical of GOP opponents but much more moderate. And for the record, that F-bomb is a riff on Vice President Joe Biden’s use of the word when ACA passed in 2010.

The NRCC’s behavior also contrasted with the dignity shown by Chief Justice John Roberts as he announced the ruling and President Barrack Obama in his speech. It showed here in Utah, too, when supporters of the ACA, including doctors, nurses, businesspeople and others, spoke of how the ACA could help the people they serve.

Jenn Hyvonen of the Fourth Street Clinic, which cares for the homeless, told me of a client with a raging case of cellulitis, an infection that attacks the skin. She showed me photos; the woman’s legs were red,
pitted with sores and swollen with edema.

The clinic has tried several times to get her on Medicaid but hasn’t been able to. The woman lives at the Road Home shelter with permission to stay inside during the day. Cellulitis is best treated with intravenous antibiotics, but all Fourth Street can give her is oral medication and bandages.

“She needs to be in a skilled nursing facility,” Hyvonen said, but as things are, that’s not possible.

I have high hopes for the ACA, not least because we can keep our 24-year-old daughter on our insurance policy until she’s 26. My providers can’t charge me more just because I’m a woman, nor drop us if we get sick.

It’s even more important for the legions of uninsured Utahns, of whom 245,000 will be able to get affordable coverage when the act takes full effect in 2014. Thousands of small businesses can apply for tax credits to help cover their employees, and seniors won’t have to pay so much for their meds.

Equally important is that the ACA will allow people with diseases such as diabetes to get the care they need before they need the emergency room at extraordinary cost.

The Utah Health Policy Project, a nonpartisan nonprofit, estimates that if the ACA survives, 77 percent of Utahns will be covered by the private insurance market and/or Medicaid.

This is a huge, complicated and expensive change for Utah and the nation. But if the ACA survives, millions of us will have coverage we may lack today. It’s a big, bold, expensive initiative that certainly has its critics — Utah’s congressional delegation among them — but if Obama is re-elected, it will be inspected, judged, honed and fined-tuned as time goes on.

As Steve Hatch of Hatch Family Chocolates put it, “I’m hoping they stop this stupid political fight and just make it better.”

Having enjoyed his dark chocolates with a glass of port wine, I’ll drink to that.

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