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U.S. health care reform's first anniversary celebrated in NY

by Veronica Lewin

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The Affordable Care Act turned one last week, and Health Care For All New York celebrated the occasion with Rep. Paul Tonko.

The congressman and representatives from Health Care For All New York, a statewide coalition comprised of 105 organizations, hosted a birthday party for the federal act March 23 in Albany's Legislative Office Building. Before serving cake, the group highlighted the successes of the legislation and called upon state lawmakers to take action needed to ensure New York will receive federal funding that will become available.

"There's an attempt under way to starve the baby, and we cannot afford that, as tens of millions of people. We're celebrating a victory so that all of us, as an American community, can prosper from the wisdom, the soundness, and the nurturing of health care that's affordable and accessible," said Tonko, D-Amsterdam, of efforts by some Republicans in congress to dismantle President Barack Obama's health care reform.

The federal act was signed into law on March 23, 2010, providing health care coverage to 32 million uninsured Americans. While some provisions of the Affordable Care Act will not be implemented until 2014, many aspects of it are in effect now.

Ninety days after its enactment, uninsured people with a serious pre-existing condition were given access to coverage. Insurance companies are no longer allowed to discriminate against children with pre-existing conditions or place lifetime limits on coverage, children can remain on their parents' insurance plan until the age of 26 and coverage is guaranteed for preventive care, among other benefits.

Tonko and Rep. Eliot Engel, D-Bronx, voted in favor of the Affordable Care Act last year. Since its passage, the federal act has faced much opposition from people who think it is unconstitutional, including many Republicans, according to the congressmen.

"One year has passed and the 'Chicken Little' cries from Republicans have been exposed — the sky has not fallen and the false arguments made at the time are not the case. Lies about 'death panels' have been proven false, the government has not taken over the health care industry and the economy has not been destroyed," Engel said in a statement.

"They used fear and lies to frighten Americans in the lead up to passage, and in the months since, a tactic that was shameful at the time and remains so to this day," Engel said.