The Business Council of Alabama’s Healthcare Forum of 2013 featured two days of educational sessions on how the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act will affect businesses, employees, and the economy and a concluding speech from President Barack Obama’s architect of his signature health care legislation.

The July 16-17 forum at the Renaissance Ross Bridge Golf Resort and Spa in Hoover was sponsored by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, Drummond Co. Inc., Pfizer, Sanofi US, and St. Vincent’s Health System.

BCA Chairman Carl Jamison, of JamisonMoneyFarmer PC in Tuscaloosa, opened the conference.

President’s mandatory-insurance field general spoke

Nancy-Ann DeParle, Obama’s former deputy chief of staff for policy and the architect of his health care reform effort, in the keynote address waived off predictions of dire consequences under full implementation of the PPACA, commonly known as Obamacare. “It doesn’t nationalize the health care system,” she said.

Jennifer Pierotti, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s manager of health care policy, offered the business community’s take on Obamacare mandates that force certain businesses to offer health insurance or be fined. “The employer mandate is harming the workforce,” she said.

“Taxes are going up,” said Mark Baker, a CPA and principal with Jackson Thornton. He predicted that taxes will increase on businesses due to the PPACA.

Many PPACA regulations have not been explained. “If you are not confused, you are not paying attention,” said BCA President and CEO William J. Canary.

The Business Council of Alabama supports repeal of the PPACA but in the interim supports Obama’s one-year delay of the Jan. 1 deadline for businesses to comply.
Sessions were offered on PPACA details

Available to participants were eight sessions on aspects of employee health and business well-being: helping employees manage physical pain, the cost of controlling pain management, health literacy, transition of care, wellness, details of the PPACA, employee benefit changes, and communicating the upcoming PPACA and how it will affect employers and employees.

In addition, State Health Officer Dr. Don Williamson and St. Vincent’s Hospital CEO John O’Neil led a discussion of the future of the state Medicaid programs under the new Regional Care Organization structure the Legislature put in place this year.

Williamson said the best way to reduce the number of Alabamians on Medicaid is to invest in education, expand the economy and create jobs. There are about 940,000 Alabamians on Medicaid, nearly 200,000 more than when the economy peaked in 2007-08.

“The best Medicaid program in the world is creating jobs and economic opportunity,” O’Neil said.

A July U.S. Chamber of Commerce business outlook survey said that businesses expect the mandate requiring most employers to offer health insurance to “negatively impact their employees.” Others expressed frustration with the law’s effect on their plans. “The biggest obstacle to hiring is the health care law,” Pierotti said.