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Political

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Trump announces plan to further privatize Medicare

President Trump flew to Orlando, Florida Thursday to promote an executive order to further privatize Medicare, the federal health program for the elderly.

At an event originally titled “Saving Medicare from Socialist Destruction,” Trump unleashed a rant against all those who call for even a limited expansion of Medicare as “socialist.” He sought to combine health care demagoguery with anti-immigrant bigotry, warning: “Medicare is under threat like never before. I will never allow these politicians to steal your health care and give it away to illegal aliens.”

In reality, Trump has called for more than \$800 billion in cuts in Medicare funding over a ten-year period as part of his efforts to finance massive increases in military spending and trillion-dollar tax cuts for big business and the wealthy.



President Donald Trump signs an executive order about Medicare at the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center, Thursday, Oct. 3, 2019, in The Villages, Fla. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)

After the Florida rally, Trump signed an executive order to promote the benefits of Medicare Advantage, under which private insurers are allowed to offer Medicare coverage and make a profit from it.

These plans have been encouraged under both Republican and Democratic administrations and generally target healthier and more affluent senior citizens, leaving those sicker and poorer to what is now called “original Medicare.”

“Today’s executive order is yet another giveaway to the corporations that run Medicare Advantage plans,” wrote Nancy Altman, president of Social Security Works. “Medicare Advantage is a hustle designed to allow for-profit corporations to suck up public dollars,” she said.

“These changes would cost the government more while threatening the long-term solvency of Medicare,” wrote Eagan Kemp of Public Citizen.

About one-third of all Medicare recipients are now enrolled in Medicare Advantage, and a significant expansion would threaten to leave “original Medicare” patients as a stigmatized, “ghetto” population, with doctors refusing to see them in favor of the more lucrative Medicare Advantage enrollees.

The executive order gives private insurers more flexibility to offer supplemental benefits, loosens requirements for seniors to sign up for the Medicare Advantage plans, and allows

insurers to pay cash rebates to boost enrollment. It also boosts tele-medicine, which involves potential advances in remote diagnostic (and even clinical) procedures. Under the profit-driven health care system, however, tele-medicine would inevitably be used to cut costs, reducing in-person care at the expense of patients' health.

The main targets of Trump's speech were former Vice President Joe Biden's two leading rivals for the Democratic presidential nomination, Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, who have both campaigned for the establishment of a "Medicare for all" program under which the federal health care program would be made the universal insurer for all Americans, effectively ending private health insurance programs.

The WSWS has **previously examined** the demagogic and insincere character of the Democrats' embrace of the slogan "Medicare for all." Suffice it to say here that the slogan has nothing to do with "socialism," except in the fevered demagogy of the ultra-right Republicans, who also denounced Medicare at its establishment in 1965 in the same terms.

As he usually does, Trump wandered off the health care topic to denounce his political opponents, claiming that the impeachment inquiry launched by the Democrats was inspired by the drug manufacturers, who were opposed to his (nonexistent) efforts to lower drug prices. In fact, both parties are beholden to the giant pharmaceutical companies, who helped design Obamacare, while at the same time lavishly funding current Republican efforts to sabotage it.

As Trump was making this announcement, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi flew to Miami-Ft. Lauderdale. She met with Venezuelan exiles and the ambassador of the US-backed phony government of Juan Guaido, the Venezuelan legislator who had himself proclaimed president by the Trump administration but has failed in his efforts to engineer a military coup against the elected government of Nicolas Maduro.

The two events demonstrated the underlying unity of the corporate elite in the United States—despite the claims of unbridgeable differences between the two parties: The top Republican and top Democrat in Washington DC travelled to Florida Thursday to stage events advocating ultra-right policies.

The concurrent events—both Trump and Pelosi were denouncing opponents labelled as "socialist" at virtually the same moment—showed the common class standpoint of both capitalist parties. They may denounce each other furiously, as in the ongoing impeachment campaign by House Democrats, but they both line up against the American working class and against countries targeted by American imperialism for attack.

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On the south lawn of the White House, on his way to board a helicopter and then Air Force One to Orlando, Trump made remarks urging the Chinese government to investigate Biden and his son over Hunter Biden's business activities in China. He denounced Biden, who until recently led all polls among Democratic candidates to challenge Trump in 2020, saying that both the former vice president and his son were corrupt.

Trump was doubling down on his pressure on Ukraine to investigate the Bidens, made in a phone call to the Ukrainian president July 25. The exposure of this call by a CIA agent working in the White House became the trigger for the House Democrats to launch an impeachment inquiry against the president on September 17. In response, Trump is doing publicly, through a repeated appeal to Ukraine joined by an appeal to China, what he did previously in a secret, classified call to Ukraine.

While Trump was in Orlando, only a few hundred miles away in the Ft. Lauderdale suburb of Weston, House Speaker Pelosi was attending a forum along with four other Democratic representatives to discuss the crisis in Venezuela and the plight of Venezuelan refugees who have transformed Weston into a Venezuelan enclave similar to the Cuban-populated neighborhoods of Miami.

An estimated 190,000 Venezuelans live in south Florida, a small fraction of those who have fled the economic crisis triggered by a US blockade and the collapse of oil prices, as well as gross mismanagement by the Maduro government, which has nothing to do with socialism but uses the word to disguise its promotion of a capitalist layer linked to the military. The exile community in south Florida is dominated by ultra-right and wealthy elements who left the country, in many cases years ago, in opposition to Maduro's predecessor Hugo Chavez.

This line-up was signaled by the presence of Carlos Vecchio, the US representative of the rump Guaido "government" which actually does not control a square inch of Venezuelan territory—except for the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington DC, which was seized by US police and then handed over to Guaido's nominee.

Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz, the local congresswoman and host of the event, declared: "Speaker Pelosi led the House in passing tough measures to protect Venezuelans, here and at home. The speaker and my House colleagues are eager to strategize with Venezuelans in Florida on how to continue these efforts."

This is the same political figure who was forced to resign in 2016 as chair of the Democratic National Committee after it was revealed by WikiLeaks that she had been trying to rig the outcome of the primaries against Bernie Sanders and in favor of Hillary Clinton.

Representative Debbie Mucarsel-Powell of Miami, one of the 43 Democrats who captured a Republican-held seat in 2018, denounced the Venezuelan government, saying, “This is a regime that is killing its own people, starving its own people, taking away their very basic needs for survival.” She continued, “And it is extremely important to work together, in a unified manner, with our allies to put pressure on Russia, to put pressure on Cuba, so that we get Maduro out.”

The logic of the policies backed by both the Trump administration and congressional Democrats is an outside military intervention, using US, Brazilian, Colombian or other military forces to overthrow the Maduro government and impose a US-backed stooge regime. This would mean a war on the South American continent on the scale of Iraq or Afghanistan, with similar consequences in terms of death and destruction.

The failure of Trump’s efforts earlier this year to use Guaido as a lever for the overthrow of Maduro is one of the foreign policy debacles that is behind the efforts of the military-intelligence apparatus and the Democratic Party to replace Trump with an equally reactionary government that is more effective in pursuing the interests of American imperialism.

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