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A Death Sentence for Thousands and Thousands of People

The American people, whether they are Democrats, Republicans or Independents, understand that we have a corrupt campaign finance system which allows billionaires and their lobbyists to play an enormously powerful role in electing candidates, defeating candidates and in crafting legislation. This is true of the Democratic Party and it is true of the Republican Party. Today, with Republicans in control of the White House, the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House, we are seeing how this corrupt process plays out for the priorities of the Republican party and for their billionaire campaign contributors.

This so-called reconciliation bill, President Trump's "big, beautiful bill" that the Republicans are rushing through the House right now is a rather extraordinary piece of legislation. In many respects, given the crises facing our country, this legislation does exactly the opposite of what should be done.

It is no secret that we have more income and wealth inequality in our country today than we have ever had.

Today, the wealthiest man in the world, Mr. Elon Musk, who is now worth more than \$400 billion, owns more wealth than the bottom 52% of American society. The top 1% owns more wealth than the bottom 93%. And CEOs of large corporations now make over 350 times what their workers make.

Unbelievably, according to the RAND Corporation, over the past 50 years, nearly \$80 trillion in wealth has been redistributed from the bottom 90% of the American people to the top 1%. What we have seen is the very wealthiest people in America are becoming much richer while at the same time, 60% of Americans are living paycheck to paycheck and many millions of families are struggling to put food on the table. That is the economic reality of today.

What does President Trump and Republicans' reconciliation bill do to address this grossly unfair and unstable situation? What are they doing when the very rich are becoming much richer while working families struggle?

Here's the answer: this legislation makes the rich and wealthy campaign contributors even richer while making life harder and more stressful for the working families of our country.

This legislation provides massive tax breaks to the top 1% and large corporations in our country and pays for these tax cuts by cutting Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act, nutrition, education and other programs that are life and death for working families.

Let me give you one example of how outrageous this legislation is.

As currently written, this bill provides a \$235 billion tax break to the top two-tenths of 1% by increasing the estate tax exemption for couples to \$30 million.

The estate tax is only applicable to the very wealthiest people in this country who inherit substantial sums of money from a relative.

Under this provision, a couple that inherits \$30 million would now pay ZERO tax on that inheritance. Once again, this provision applies only to the top two-tenths of 1% of Americans – the very, very wealthiest people in this country. 99.8% of Americans would not benefit by one nickel under this provision.

Further, this legislation would provide a \$420 billion tax break to large, profitable corporations that are stashing their profits in the Cayman Islands and other offshore tax havens and who, by the way, are replacing American workers with robots.

Bottom line: The tax provisions in the reconciliation bill provide huge benefits to the people in our country who need them the least while doing great harm to ordinary Americans.

whether you're a Democrat, Republican or Independent, you know that our current health care system is broken, it is dysfunctional, it is cruel and it is wildly expensive.

Despite spending almost twice as much per capita on health care as any other major nation, some 85 million Americans are uninsured or underinsured. And we remain the only major country on earth not to guarantee healthcare to all as a human right.

So, given that reality, how does this reconciliation bill address the horrific health care crisis in America? Does it expand health care to more Americans and lower the number of uninsured? Does it take on the greed of the insurance companies and the drug companies who make tens and tens of billions of dollars every year by ripping off the people of our country? Is that what this reconciliation bill does? Not quite.

What this legislation does do is cut Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act by \$715 billion, which the Congressional Budget Office has estimated would eliminate health insurance for

over 13.7 million Americans. In other words, this legislation makes a very bad situation, in terms of our health care crisis, catastrophically worse.

If we were to pass this bill, the number of Americans who would be uninsured or underinsured would rise to almost 100 million Americans. In other words, instead of lowering the number of uninsured or underinsured people in this country, this bill greatly increases that number. But that's not all that this legislation does.

This bill forces millions of Medicaid recipients who make as little as \$16,000 a year to pay a co-pay of \$35 each time they visit a doctor when they get sick – up to 5% of their annual income. What will be the impact of that?

According to a study from Yale University some 68,000 Americans die every year because they don't get to a doctor on time.

Now, if you're making a couple of hundred thousand dollars a year, the odds are that a \$35 co-payment will not deter you from going to the doctor. You may not like it, but you fork over the \$35 to go to the doctor when you are sick.

But if you are a low income American and you are struggling to pay the rent, or you're struggling to buy food for your kids or pay for child care, that \$35 co-pay may be just too much – and the result is that you don't see the doctor when you should.

When you throw almost 14 million Americans off the health insurance they have and when you force low-income people to pay a \$35 co-payment that they can't afford to pay, no one can deny that many thousands more Americans will die if this bill is signed into law.

This bill is a death sentence for many thousands and thousands of people.

Further, when Trump and the Republicans in the House make massive cuts to Medicaid, they are also talking about making massive cuts to community health centers which provide primary health care to over 32 million low-income and working class Americans.

Community health centers rely on Medicaid for 43% of their revenue. When you make massive cuts to Medicaid you are significantly cutting back on the access that millions of low-income and working class Americans will have to primary health care.

It is not just community health centers that would be devastated by this legislation. All across this country, rural hospitals are shutting down and facing enormous financial pressure. This legislation will only accelerate those closures and bring increased hardship to rural America at a time when rural America already has enough problems.

Here is what Rick Pollack, the president and CEO of the American Hospital Association said: "These proposed cuts will not make the Medicaid program work better for the 72 million Americans who rely on it. Instead, it will lead to millions of hardworking Americans losing

access to health care and many of our nation's hospitals struggling to maintain services and stay open for their communities.”

Further, I hope my colleagues will listen to what Bruce Siegel, the president and CEO of America's Essential Hospitals said in opposition to this bill: “Hospitals, which already operate on thin margins, cannot absorb such losses without reducing services or closing their doors altogether.”

That is exactly what rural America does not need. We don't need more hospitals shutting down. We cannot allow that to happen.

And let's be clear: It's not just hospitals and community health centers that are opposed to this legislation. Physicians throughout this country have also come out in strong opposition to this legislation.

Let me read from a statement issued today in opposition to this bill from the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American College of Physicians and the American Psychiatric Association: “Our organizations, representing more than 400,000 physicians who serve millions of patients, are alarmed by proposals to implement cuts or other structural changes to Medicaid during the budget reconciliation process. Cuts to Medicaid will have grave consequences for patients, communities and the entire health care system. With reduced federal funding, it will be harder for patients to access care, states will be forced to drop enrollees from coverage, and it will limit the health care services patients can access and cut payment rates ... The impact of cuts to Medicaid funding is significant and wide-reaching, and it must be reconsidered.”

That's what medical organizations in our country representing 400,000 doctors are saying about this disastrous piece of legislation.

Further, at a time when 22% of our seniors are trying to survive on less than \$15,000 a year, this legislation will make it much harder for seniors and people with disabilities to receive the care they desperately need in nursing homes. When Medicaid provides over 60% of the revenue nursing homes rely on, slashing Medicaid will be a disaster for the seniors and disabled who need to live in nursing home care.

And that's not all that this legislation is doing.

For the vast majority of Americans, including myself, who believe that women should have the right to control their own bodies, this bill essentially defunds Planned Parenthood which provides vital health care to millions of women.

But it is not just our health care system that would be devastated under this legislation.

While this bill provides massive tax breaks to billionaires, it would cut \$290 billion from nutrition programs that would take food away from an estimated 4 million children and about half a million seniors.

I don't know if there is any religion in this world where it would be morally appropriate to take food out of the mouths of hungry kids and frail seniors in order to provide more tax breaks to billionaires?

Further, For the many young people in our country struggling with student debt and others who wonder how they will ever be able to afford to go to college, this bill cuts federal funding for education by more than \$350 billion.

What does that mean? Among other things, it means that the average student loan borrower with a bachelor's degree in America would see his or her loan payments increase by about \$3,000 per year – or some \$244 a month.

At a time when college is now unaffordable for millions of young people, at a time when we desperately need a well-educated population and the best educated workforce in the world, this bill moves us in the wrong direction.

Finally, at a time when we already spend more on the military than the next nine nations combined and when everyone knows there is massive waste and fraud in the Pentagon, this bill increases defense spending by \$150 billion.

And this is just some of what's in this terrible bill. There are many other horrific provisions which are equally damaging that I have not touched upon.

It seems to me that this bill reflects exactly what is wrong with our current corrupt political system. When we have massive income and wealth inequality, our job is to demand that the wealthy and large corporations start paying their fair share of taxes, not give huge tax breaks to the very rich.

When 85 million Americans are uninsured or underinsured, our job should be to guarantee health care to every man, woman and child in this country, not throw 13 million Americans off of the health care they currently have.

When children and seniors go hungry here in the wealthiest country on Earth, our job should be to make sure that all Americans have the nutrition they need to lead healthy lives, not increase the level of hunger in our country.

In many respects, this bill represents exactly why many Americans are giving up on democracy and have such contempt for Congress. At a time when the richest people have never had it so good, they see Republican leadership working overtime to make the billionaire class even richer.

At a time when a majority of Americans are struggling to put food on the table and pay for health care, they see Republican leadership making life even more difficult for average Americans.

MAY 15, 2025

This is the slightly edited text of Senator Bernie Sanders's floor remarks on the Trump budget bill.

Bernie Sanders is a US Senator, and the ranking member of the Senate budget committee. He represents the state of Vermont, and is the longest-serving independent in the history of Congress.