

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Floor Remarks on Medicaid Cuts

May 13, 2025

[**\[VIDEO\]**](#)

Sen. Cantwell: Mr. President, I rise today to urge my colleagues to oppose any proposals to take health care coverage away from the American people who need it most.

Today, the House Energy and Commerce Committee is marking up a section of what's called their budget reconciliation bill, which would reduce spending by \$912 billion over 10 years. That's a lot of money. Out of that, \$715 billion would come from Medicaid and other health care programs that are essential to Americans, children, and our most vulnerable families.

House Republicans say that these cuts are about waste, fraud, and abuse -- but the real fraud is telling the American people that by implementing these requirements, that somehow these policies are going to save money.

The truth is, it's just making it harder on Americans to stay on Medicaid. A Medicaid program that even the Seattle Times has said cutting it could hurt our state's poor and our children.

So is that what we're trying to do, give a tax break to corporations and billionaires by cutting the effects of Medicaid on poor people and children?

The proposed work requirements basically make Medicaid beneficiaries submit paperwork every month to prove that they are working at least 80 hours a month, but we already know that 64% of Medicaid beneficiaries are working. That's what the big fraud is. This chart right here shows that people who couldn't find other affordable health insurance and are working [full-time is] 44% [of] Medicaid [adult recipients].

Some are not working because of their disabilities and due to retirement. So, 8% of them are not doing that, 20% are working part time, 12% we basically said it's better for you to be a caregiver and provide the caregiving, and we'll cover your health insurance costs so you can provide the caregiving, because that way the families stay in the home instead of going to their nursing home, which would cost all of us a ton more amount of money. So, they're working.

There are 10% not working [due] to illness or disability, and some are not working because we're smart enough to let people who go to school, but don't have the ability to get affordable insurance, allow some percentage, a small percentage of them to be on Medicaid too.

So, what is it that the House is really trying to say? They're really trying to sneak in a massive cut to Medicaid that will shut down hospitals, kick people off of Medicaid, make them go to emergency rooms, cost us all more money, and do nothing but perpetrate a fraud. When in reality, people are working and those that aren't working, we're happy that they're not working because one -- could be due to an illness, or they're a caregiver, or they are working part time.

So, all of these issues show that the House isn't serious. In 2018 another state tried this, 'oh, brilliant idea. We're going to make a work requirement.' Now, Mr. President, if I hadn't been in the United States Senate at the same time the House of Representatives tried another canard -- 'oh, we're going to block grant Medicaid. We're going to block grant it and it's going to be great, and then we're going to save money.'

No, no, the hospitals, the Republican County Commissioners, the jails -- everybody basically said, 'Don't do that. You're going to cut Medicaid -- you're going to decimate the safety net that makes health care work in our communities. Don't do it.' And because we had three Republicans join us, we were able to stop that ridiculous idea of block granting Medicaid.

But in 2018, Arkansas tried the same thing that the House of Representatives are now suggesting. They became the first state to establish a work requirement for certain Medicaid enrollees. It took just four months, and the new requirement got 18,000 people kicked off Medicaid.

Where do you think those people go? You think they don't have any health care needs? You don't think they go to the hospital and cost us all a bunch load more money. That's what they do. They cost all of us a bunch load more money.

A federal court ruling stopped Arkansas from implementing that rule a year later, because it disrupted so many people because of the work requirement.

And after that, a Harvard University study found that Arkansas's work requirement didn't lead to more people getting jobs. It actually took away their health insurance and then they didn't have the ability to stay as healthy and get jobs. So, is that what's going to happen across our country, to my state all because the Republicans are putting this nonsensical idea on the table?

Still, the issues that other states tried the same thing, and other states also stopped their ridiculous idea. So, this isn't something that works, and according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, more than 780,000 Washingtonians could be subject to [a] work requirement and are at risk of having their coverage taken away.

Now, I'm already done fighting with the DOGE people who basically said, 'oh, waste, fraud and abuse, and Social Security.' Really? My constituent not only had his social security benefits cut, they said he was dead. He wasn't dead. And not only did he go there, wait in line, crummy service, and say that he wasn't dead --- they still, after that --- after he notified Social Security and told him he wasn't dead, and I want my Social Security, they had the audacity to go back into his bank account and claw back money out of his bank account, still saying that he was dead.

Now is that what really the House of Representatives wants us to do, harass the heck out of 780,000 Washingtonians to write a proposal every month, telling them they're somehow doing something? Or do we want to set up a program to cover those who can't get affordable insurance and cover them because we don't want to pay the extra costs at the emergency room.

That's what we're trying to say. We don't want to pay the extra costs. So this proposal just doesn't make sense, and so I'm not surprised that I got a copy of a letter passed on by health officials in my state that said, 'the undersign here are writing to you to oppose any cuts to the Medicaid

rates, any adjustments the federal Medicaid assistance program to our health care systems are changes to the direct payment programs.'

Well, what's surprising about this is it's signed by the Republican county commissioners, the Republican state representatives. The people in that community who know what it takes to build a healthy community, they sent a letter basically saying, don't do the very things that the House of Representatives just did.

My own constituents, bipartisan Republicans and Democrats, though, already said, don't do this, because you will cut the legs out from under us. We won't have rural hospitals. And just think about all the jails that are dealing with the opioid and fentanyl epidemic, and now all of a sudden, you're taking Medicaid away from them. What are they going to do?

You're going to make all those people go to an emergency room? Now all of our emergency rooms, instead of these people being in a detention facility, are all going to be in an emergency room crowding us all out from getting health care?

So this idea is ridiculous, and people all across my state are already speaking out about the choices or lack thereof. I spoke to a Medicaid patient in Eastern Washington who was worried that she wouldn't be able to be supported when she needed to go to a nursing home, because where is all the money going to go?

We're trying to save enough money by putting people on Medicaid, so the people who do need to go to a facility can, but a resident told me that without Medicaid, her father wouldn't have been able to afford treatment or medication for his mental health issues.

So that's really what we want to do? Give a tax break to wealthy, wealthy people and to corporations, just so we can be kicking poor people off of Medicaid.

So, I hope our colleagues will not allow this to happen. I hope that our Senate colleagues will be ready to show that the defeat of the fentanyl epidemic needs to be addressed, and helping Medicaid continue with substance abuse treatment is key.

Recent polls show that 77% of Americans have a favorable view of Medicaid, including 64% of Republicans. And as I said, last week, I met with the health care providers, mostly from Central Washington, who said, 'you literally will take away essential revenue that keeps our hospitals open and our state could see five to seven hospitals close.'

That is not what we want to see out of a budget proposal to give a tax break to wealthy corporations and individuals. So, I ask my colleagues to make sure that we are fighting these cuts to Medicaid. Our communities are demanding it. They are watching, and just like with the block granting of Medicaid, they're not going to believe another idea that has already been tried and failed and doesn't even meet the goals of being successful in making the most affordable health care possible and keeping the cost down on all of us.

I urge my colleagues to reject this House proposal on Medicaid. I thank the president. I yield the floor.