

Liberal Church Leaders: Don't Touch Medicaid

Friday, a group of 34 faith leaders representing Catholic, Jewish, Muslim and other faith traditions sent a joint letter to each member of the U.S. Senate, urging against passage of the American Health Care Act, which they say will cause millions of Americans to “lose health care.”

Medicaid is a health insurance program jointly funded by the federal government and the states, which is administered by each respective state in accordance with federal guidelines—guidelines that are currently established by the Affordable Care Act, otherwise known as Obamacare. Most states expanded their Medicaid coverage under Obamacare, but the AHCA would allow them to roll those expansions back.

This move is scripturally based on 2 Thessalonians 3:10, which states:

For when we were with you, we commanded you that if any will not work, neither shall he eat.

Medicaid was meant to be a safety net for those incapable of working, and those who do work but do not earn enough to pay for health insurance. But under the provisions of Obamacare, the number of covered Americans grew substantially. It is estimated that approximately 20 percent of Medicaid recipients are capable of working, but choose not to because there is no incentive to seek employment.

Last year, the federal government spent approximately \$392 billion on Medicaid, CHIP and Obamacare subsidies. Combined, the states spent approximately \$545 billion. That's slightly more than 5 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product and nearly twice as much as the government spends on national defense.

It is estimated that 72 million Americans receive Medicaid, CHIP, and Obamacare subsidy benefits. Of the 11 million Americans currently enrolled in Obamacare, 8 million receive subsidies at a cost of approximately \$28 billion a year.

Under the AHCA legislation, states would be allowed to rollback their Medicaid programs to pre-Obamacare levels, but are not required to do so. The letter from the left-leaning faith leaders suggests otherwise. It states:

We are united in a shared commitment to prioritize low-income, sick, elderly, disabled and vulnerable populations in the health care decisions before Congress. Our scriptures affirm our moral responsibility to ensure all may live with dignity and the opportunity to recognize their full potential. Access to affordable, quality health care should not and cannot be a privilege; it is a requirement rooted in faith to protect the life and dignity of every person.

We have grave concerns about the future of the Medicaid program under current proposals to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act. We strongly oppose any legislation that repeals or rolls back the Medicaid expansion or converts Medicaid's financing through a block grant or per capita cap.

Medicaid enables one in five Americans to access quality health care and live with dignity. Medicaid covers populations our scriptures and faith traditions call on us to prioritize for care: low-income children, seniors, and people with disabilities. Through the Medicaid expansion, 11 million low-income individuals have gained access to quality, affordable coverage.

But proposals to eliminate the Medicaid expansion and to institute a per capita cap would make individuals often in most need of medical care the least likely to get it. The

nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that by eliminating the Medicaid expansion and instituting a per capita cap, the House-passed bill, the American Health Care Act, would cause 14 million people to lose their Medicaid coverage within the decade.

Medicaid is a lean and efficient program: its costs per beneficiary are lower than for private insurance, while providing a more comprehensive benefits package for vulnerable populations. When adjusting for the greater health needs, Medicaid spending per person is an estimated 25 percent lower than in the private market.

The group also announced it will be sending its representatives to Washington, D.C., this week to lobby as representatives of the “faith community” to urge senators not to vote for the AHCA. The letter was signed by the following organizations:

- Adorers of the Blood of Christ, U.S. Region
- American Friends Service Committee
- Bread for the World
- Conference of Major Superiors of Men
- Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
- Disciples Center for Public Witness (Disciples of Christ)
- Dominican Sisters of Grand Rapids, Mich.
- Ecumenical Poverty Initiative
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- The Episcopal Church
- Franciscan Action Network
- The Friends Committee on National Legislation
- Islamic Society of North America
- Ladysmith Servite Sisters
- Leadership Conference of Women Religious
- Lutheran Services in America
- Medical Mission Sisters

- Methodist Federal for Social Action
- National Council of Churches
- National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
- NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
- The Office of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation of the Society of the Sacred Heart, USC Province
- Our Lad of Victory Missionary Sisters
- Pax Christi USA
- Presbyterian Church USA
- Religious Institute
- Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet
- Sisters of Mercy of the Americas' Institute Justice Team
- Society of St. Vincent de Paul, National Council USA
- Sojourners
- United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
- The United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society
- Union for Reform Judaism
- Unitarian Universalist Association

The following are a series of comments about the effort from leaders of the group:

- NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice Executive Director Sister Simone Campbell: "Medicaid answers a civic and faithful call to care for the most vulnerable in our society. Any attempt by Congress to weaken this program is cruel and mean-spirited. We people of faith will continue to insist that our values are the basis for action, not crass economic choices. The AHCA is a Trojan horse tax bill that promotes trickle-down economics, which Pope Francis says is wrong. Senators: Don't hurt our people; protect Medicaid."
- Presbyterian Church Office of Public Witness Director Rev. Jimmie Hawkins: "There is no greater responsibility for the government than to be engaged in care for our

most vulnerable citizens. It is a moral responsibility that should only be strengthened and there is no justification which can be given to cut away funding. The Presbyterian Church (.) Office of Public Witness strongly opposes any decision that repeals or rolls back the Medicaid expansion or truncates Medicaid's financing."

- Bread for the World President Rev. David Beckman: "Protecting Medicaid is a priority for the faith community. Taking away Medicaid from 14 million people will increase hunger and poverty in the United States. Without health insurance, people must often choose between putting food on the table and receiving the medical care they need. Bread for the World prays that senators will oppose any attempt to weaken this life-saving program."
- Friends Committee on National Legislation Executive Secretary Diane Randall: "Medicaid serves as a lifeline for tens of millions of Americans. Yet, Congress continues to consider proposals that are unfair to low-income individuals and perpetuate injustice. Capping Medicaid and rolling back the Medicaid expansion will do nothing to address instability in the marketplace or lower premiums. Instead, states will be forced to eliminate health services, leaving millions without access to needed care. I urge the Senate to reject these irresponsible proposals and instead call upon every senator to reject capping Medicaid and any rollback of the Medicaid expansion. Congress needs to work in a responsible and deliberate manner to truly address the real problems within America's health care system."
- Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism Director Barbara Weinstein: "Medicaid is a central aspect of our social contract as Americans, ensuring that people in the most dire need—including children, low-income Americans, and people with disabilities—have access to health insurance. Ending the successful Medicaid

expansion created by the Affordable Care Act and creating a per capita cap on the program would break that covenant. This is not only an affront to American values, but Jewish tradition as well.” {eo}