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Wyden Statement at Finance Committee Hearing on HHS Budget
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This administration, from day one, has preferred “alternative facts” and convenient spin to the truth. One of the most recent examples was its budget proposal, which double-counted two trillion dollars to maintain some whiff of fiscal responsibility while it slashed health programs and protections for basic living standards.

The budget math is fake, but the extreme agenda that would deprive millions of Americans of access to health care and wipe out living standards is not.

Unfortunately this morning I have to split time between the Finance Committee and the Intelligence Committee, so I’ll keep my remarks brief. But there are a few issues in the president’s budget and the administration’s agenda I’d like to address.

First is Medicaid. Secretary Price is the captain of the president’s health care team. He’s been the top advocate for Trumpcare, a bill that cuts Medicaid by \$834 billion to pay for massive tax breaks for the wealthy.

Fourteen million Americans would lose coverage, and millions more would see caps on their care. As if that wasn’t enough of a cut, the budget proposal that came out a few weeks ago goes even further, slashing hundreds of billions more from Medicaid. In a program that covers nearly half of all births, 37 million kids, millions of working families and people with disabilities and two out of three nursing home beds in America, that would be an enormous blow to people across the generations.

These facts and figures have been met by a wave of the hand from Secretary Price. When asked if his proposed cuts would result in millions of Americans losing access to Medicaid, he responded, “Absolutely not.” He went further, claiming “there are no cuts to the Medicaid program,” and he also said, “nobody will be worse off financially.” I’ve heard Secretary Price and others make the baffling argument that people are actually worse off on Medicaid -- that their health doesn’t improve as a result of gaining coverage. Often this argument is based on a brief, old study performed in my home state.

Here’s the bottom line on Medicaid. Seventy-four million Americans rely on this program for health coverage. Parents with sick kids, people with disabilities, seniors in nursing homes who have nobody to turn to for help if their benefits disappear, and thousands of Oregonians who are healthier under my home state’s model. It would be a tough sell to convince those people that they’re worse off being enrolled in Medicaid, or that the program needs more than a trillion dollars in cuts.

And public opinion is clear – two out of three enrollees are happy with the program. Seven out of ten Americans say Congress should leave it as-is – no block grants, no per-capita caps.

Fortunately, the budget proposal hit the wall here in Congress and there's a lot of debate left to be had on Trumpcare. But right now, the administration is causing turmoil in insurance markets, and it's already having disastrous effects for millions of families. The president issued a day-one executive order undermining the Affordable Care Act. And nobody on the Trump team can give a straight answer about whether the administration will continue making cost-sharing reduction payments that are key to making insurance affordable for working families. And because of that sabotage, insurers are pulling out of markets, and people are left without plans to choose from.

You don't have to take my word for it. The insurers are quite clear about why they're making these decisions.

Furthermore, on the campaign trail, the president said he wouldn't cut Medicare. But the Trumpcare bill shrinks the life of the program, and the budget proposal extends the mandatory cuts under the sequester by more than 30 billion dollars. The Food and Drug Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and the National Institutes of Health – all slashed in the budget. The same is true in programs aimed at basic living standards – programs that fund Meals on Wheels, child care and foster care.

This is the budget you write if you think seniors and working families have it too easy.

I want to thank Secretary Price for joining the committee today. This is never any easy appointment for a cabinet secretary, and I'm sure there will be some rigorous debate this morning. As I mentioned I'm double booked with the Intelligence Committee, so I want to thank Senator Stabenow for generously offering her time to fill in for me today. Thank you, Chairman Hatch.

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