

Opinion

A loss of Medicaid and SNAP funding will cost lives and decrease lifespans

By EMILY BURTON SHERMAN



Emily Burton Sherman

There is an estimated \$600 billion in unpaid taxes owed to our nation, according to the IRS. Spending just one additional dollar auditing the richest 10% of taxpayers in an effort to recover said billions “yields more than \$12 in revenue, while audits of below-median income taxpayers yield \$5,” reported The Quarterly Journal of Economics in November.

Yet such low-hanging fiscal fruitfulness has been left to rot on the vine. For a nation so determined to fight waste and abuse, Trump’s plan to cut the IRS by up to 50% – while also decimating Medicaid funding by the billions – smacks of targeted grift with very sharp teeth.

As reported by the Office of Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 2024, only an estimated 5.09% of paid Medicaid claims were actually fraudulent, and in those cases, the vast majority - close to 98% - are committed by providers, not the actual individual being insured.

Add to this fact the numerous state and federal fraud prevention protocols already in place and a stark picture emerges: it is astoundingly perverse for elected officials or talking heads to assert with a straight face that Medicaid is rife with abuse. Or, even more repugnantly, for any elected official to claim millions of working poor Americans must lose Medicaid funding to prevent an uprising of mythical bad actors from cheating the system.

A national fraud rate of 2% does not give our repre-

sentatives carte blanche to casually drown hundreds of thousands of our financially floundering working-class neighbors and friends. Should these devastating cuts proposed to Kentucky’s Medicaid in the latest Trump budget be allowed to slither into law, it isn’t what we’ve saved that will go down in history. Instead, our nation’s health will be measurably worsened for want of a scalpel instead of a chainsaw during its budget surgery.

The current proposal facing Congress is a \$1.7 billion affront to human decency, the fifth largest cut in any state in the nation according to the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy. To be absolutely clear: the proposed savings to Medicaid funding will not be returned to our communities. A loss of Medicaid and SNAP funding will cost lives and decrease lifespans while potentially reducing states’ GDP by \$113 billion, cut more than a million American jobs, and wipe out a potential \$8.8 billion in tax revenue for state and county governments, as reported by The Commonwealth Fund in March.

Not to be overlooked: these dire cuts to Grandpa’s healthcare will coincide in this budget bill with an additional \$3.8 trillion in growth... to the national deficit. This fact is stated clearly by the Congressional Budget Office itself, in a report on Trump’s proposed budget bill as sent to two House democrats by request last month.

The key take-away of the report was this: “The agency estimates that in general, resources would decrease for households in the lowest decile (tenth) of the income distribution, whereas resources would increase for households in the highest decile.”

The proposed cuts to Medicaid are far from a surgical procedure to snip out fraud and abuse among average Americans as a path towards national health. No. They are a bomb thrown into the poorhouse wrapped in tissue-paper promises and rhetoric.

When confronted at a recent town hall meeting about

the lives that will be lost due to the amputation of crucial Medicaid funding, Iowa Senator Joni Ernst glibly noted, “Well, we are all going to die. For heaven’s sakes, folks.”

She followed this astounding lack of humanity with a social media “apology video” that NPR reported appeared to be shot in a cemetery. In it, she points out her mistake in assuming we knew death came for us all. “But for those that would like to see eternal and everlasting life, I encourage you to embrace my lord and savior, Jesus Christ.”

What Ernst so clearly ignores is the basic principle of humanity that while many would someday like to sit at the feet of God, they’d rather not rush it if a little basic preventative healthcare would mean more days contributing to their communities as healthy, hard-working taxpayers and parents.

If Ernst and her congressional ilk are so eager to mock the very real horrors of withering away in poverty from a preventable illness due to political power plays, perhaps they should have the decency to at least hide their glee on social media before proclaiming themselves Christians in the next breath.

Our war on poverty in the Bluegrass cannot be won by allowing illness and medical bankruptcy to swallow our working-class families. In no time in history was greater strife and suffering somehow seen as a moral victory, except in the current White House.

It’s not hard to balance human decency with economic progress when your values place people of all religions, incomes and color above tax breaks for billionaires. It is certainly not hard to spot it when you don’t.

Emily Sherman is a columnist and educator who resides in Muhlenberg County with her family of miscreants, saints and the odd stray cat.

Education is about becoming a better version of ourselves

By TOMMY DRUEN



Tommy Druen

Twenty-five years ago, I sat in a chair on Centre College’s campus, clad in cap and gown, prepared—but hardly ready—to graduate. For the first time in my life, I was adrift. I had a plan, but no conviction. I was unsure whether the path ahead was mine or simply the one I had chosen because I didn’t know what else to choose.

Centre, like most colleges, typically invited a prominent figure to deliver the commencement address. That year, however, the graduating class selected one of our own—Dr. Larry Matheny. It was a decision that surprised no one, especially his students.

Dr. Matheny was more than a professor; he was an institution. Nearly four decades teaching government, a dry wit as sharp as his intellect, a fondness for gin, and a rumored familiarity with every book in the college library made him a figure of lore. I took eight of his classes during my time at Centre. Technically, I majored in government, but if I’m honest, I majored in Matheny.

As I had done so many times before, I listened to him closely. There was the expected humor, of course, but then he said something that landed with such clarity it has stayed with me ever since: “When you graduate from Centre College, you don’t know how to do any-

thing... except to learn. But if you know how to learn, you can do most anything in life.”

That statement has echoed in my mind each May as a new crop of graduates turns their tassels. It came back especially strong recently during an online exchange I had about the purpose of education. A friend insisted that the goal of education is job preparation. I pushed back—because while preparing people for the workforce is valuable, it is not the same thing as educating them. Nor do I think that should be the sole goal.

Somewhere along the way, we started conflating education with vocational training. We now expect students to emerge from college ready to plug directly into their chosen profession. Any class not deemed “practical” is dismissed as wasteful. Entire disciplines—literature, philosophy, art history—are cast aside as indulgent because they don’t come with a clear paycheck.

Even a former Kentucky Lieutenant Governor once took a swipe at history majors a few years back. As someone who has spent a good portion of his adult life studying history, I took that a bit personally.

Then there are the critics who declare that college is a waste of time altogether. And truly, college is not for everyone. “You could make more money in a skilled trade,” they argue. And they’re not wrong—many trades are both stable and lucrative. Eight weeks of training can land you in the cab of a semi-truck, with the average salary hovering near \$90,000. That’s real, respectable work.

Is a French literature major likely to make that kind

of money reading Rimbaud in the original language? Probably not. Do dentists need to study metaphysics to fill a cavity? Of course not. That’s not the point.

The question we should be asking isn’t, “What job will this get me?” It’s, “What understanding will this give me?” Because the essence of education isn’t the memorization of facts—it’s the cultivation of understanding. It’s one thing to know the definition of an atom; it’s another to grasp how atoms behave. It’s one thing to summarize a novel; it’s another to understand what the author intended to convey. Knowing the dates of a war is easy. Understanding the forces that led to it—and the ones it unleashed—is much harder.

If education were merely about job training, we could all stop learning once we punched the clock. And sadly, many do. But I believe education is about more than utility. It’s about becoming a fuller, better version of ourselves.

Plato wrote, “If a man neglects education, he walks lame to the end of his life.” I take that to heart. I don’t want to learn just to work. I want to learn to grow. To better understand the world around me—and the one within me. To take knowledge and turn it into comprehension, and hopefully, over time, into wisdom.

I may never learn everything. But I fully intend to die trying.

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U.S. could have the best health care. But not if profit-driven private sector keeps control.

By KAY TILLOW
The Kentucky Lantern

Ours is the only nation in the industrialized world that has turned health care over to the private sector, subjecting all of us to life expectancy five years below the norm in other wealthy countries. More of our babies die in the first year of life and more of our moms die in childbirth than in any other industrialized country.

We spend twice as much per person on health care in the United States as peer countries, yet we have the highest rates of death for conditions that are treatable.

On the congressional agenda are cuts to Medicaid of more than \$600 billion over 10 years. Hundreds of thousands of Kentuckians are among those in the line of fire. The results will be deadly. Administration officials are determined to offset the tax cuts that will benefit the wealthiest even though it means loss of health care for millions of Americans. People are in the streets to stop the catastrophic damage to Medicaid.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that 10.3 million people would lose their Medicaid coverage by 2034 under the GOP bill. Med Pac, the independent agency that advises Congress, predicts the projected cuts will throw 8 million onto the uninsured rolls.

Med Pac has also informed Congress that the privatized Medicare plans, misnamed Medicare Advantage, that were supposed to save money are instead costing us \$84 billion a year more than if those patients were in traditional Medicare.

So this looks like an easy fix. Leave Medicaid alone. Cut out the Medicare Advantage plans, placing those patients onto the better coverage of traditional Medicare, saving more than enough money over 10 years than is needed to offset the tax cuts. Problem solved!

But in health care things are seldom simple. The

Medicare Advantage patients who gained access to traditional Medicare would find themselves faced with unaffordable monthly premiums for the prescription drugs and supplemental coverage they would need. The Medicaid patients who were rescued from the firing squad will continue to suffer at the hands of the private Medicaid managed care companies that regularly deny 12% of claims, a rate double the awful rate in Medicare Advantage.

Medicaid patients would still have a hard time finding specialists. Their rural hospitals would continue to close as the Medicaid payments are insufficient to maintain the necessary infrastructure. Billions of the public funds provided for Medicaid patients would be siphoned into the coffers of the insurance companies as care, by law, is secondary to profit, in this privatized Medicaid system.

Those fortunate enough to have health care through their employers will continue to find the premiums, deductibles and co-pays beyond their means. The average family plan is now over \$25,000 a year. The 15 years since the passage of health care reform have left 100 million of us in medical debt in what the Commonwealth Fund accurately calls a failing health care system.

Over 130 national and local organizations have called for a national day of action on Sat., May 31, to “Demand Health Not Profit: Put Single Payer on the Nation’s Agenda.”

On that day in 25 cities from Detroit to Houston and Seattle to Charlotte, people will gather to advocate against cuts in an already failing system and in favor of enhanced Medicare for all.

The protesters are demanding passage of a publicly financed, national single-payer program that would provide comprehensive coverage to everyone.

In Kentucky, the Rally for Health Not Profit will be at noon Saturday at the Mazzoli Federal Building in Louisville. The people there will be fighting for all

of those on the firing lines and insisting that, this time around, we can remove the profits from health care and enact a plan that cares for all of us.

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