

To: Interested Parties

From: Navin Nayak, Executive Director at Center for American Progress Action Fund

Re: President Trump's Budget Shows Republicans Are on a Suicide Mission to Gut Medicaid and Core Benefit Programs

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In a year of chaos, President Donald Trump's greatest political catastrophes in 2017 revolved around one central issue: taking health care away from tens of millions of Americans. The president's budget released yesterday makes clear that he and the Republican Party will remain obsessed with this goal as long as they are in power. A recent poll conducted by the Center for American Progress (CAP) and GBA Strategies found that an overwhelming majority of Americans oppose the attacks on Americans' health care and other core benefits found in this budget:

- On top of once again calling for the repeal of the Affordable Care Act, President Trump's budget calls for slashing Medicaid by a whopping \$302 billion. Americans oppose cutting Medicaid by a margin of 80 to 20 percent.
- It breaks President Trump's promise not to cut Social Security by calling for \$72 billion in cuts to Social Security's disability programs. Americans oppose these cuts by a margin of 78 to 22 percent.
- The budget makes deep cuts to vital nutrition assistance programs, including Meals on Wheels and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly food stamps. It also calls for transforming parts of SNAP into a commodities program—a move that could line the pockets of Trump-appointed officials in the Department of Agriculture and [throughout his administration](#) who have [deep ties to industry](#). Americans oppose cutting nutrition assistance programs by a margin of 66 to 34 percent.
- The budget makes huge cuts to affordable housing programs; calls for taking housing away from people who can't find a job or work enough hours; and eliminates home heating assistance just weeks after a polar vortex. Americans oppose cutting housing assistance programs by a margin of 73 to 27 percent and home heating assistance by 78 to 22 percent.

Congressional Republicans' insistence on cutting these programs is political insanity in an environment where the public has already soured against them. Not only did Americans raise their voices and mobilize in every corner of the country to defeat President Trump's efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and gut Medicaid in Congress, but they also voted against it at the ballot box. In the contested Virginia gubernatorial race, health care was the top issue for voters, with 39 percent saying that it mattered most in deciding their vote—[twice as high as any other issue](#). Democratic Gov. Ralph Northam (VA) won those voters by 54 points—an astounding 3-to-1 margin. While the ACA was deeply polarizing, the issue of health care has not historically been a polarized issue, as voters on both sides of the aisle assume their elected officials want to strengthen access to affordable and quality health care. That is changing rapidly, however, as President Trump and congressional Republicans are on a suicide mission to gut Medicaid and weaken other popular benefit programs.

The failed attempt by President Trump and congressional Republicans to strip tens of millions of Americans of affordable health care coverage exposed the profound political danger in taking health care away from people who need it. These attacks bolstered the

popularity of the ACA to unprecedented levels and helped turn independents and moderates against the Republican Party in [record levels](#). In contrast, a Kaiser Family Foundation [tracking poll](#) found that only 28 percent of Americans now believe that repealing the ACA should be a priority.

Perhaps most surprising to many, including to Republican members of Congress, was the popularity of the Medicaid program in particular. From the beginning of Republican repeal efforts, Republican senators from Medicaid expansion states showed deep discomfort with slashing the program—no surprise given the devastating effects on rural hospitals that so many communities depend on. Indeed, the [recent CAP poll](#) found that 80 percent of Americans do not want to see the program cut, with strong opposition cutting across party lines, including Republican voters and Trump supporters. Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-WI), who has been [fantasizing about gutting Medicaid](#) since he was in college, clearly allowed his lifelong dreams to get in the way of reality. It was a rude awakening for him and for all Republicans.

Amazingly, President Trump and congressional Republicans appear to have learned nothing. They are ignoring the American people and doubling down on their disastrous strategy. In the past few weeks, President Trump, with strong support from congressional Republicans, has announced drastic changes to Medicaid that will hobble the program and harm millions of Americans. First, the Trump administration announced that for the first time in the history of the Medicaid program, it will allow states to [take health care away](#) from people who can't find work or who can't work enough hours at their job—which CAP's new poll shows a majority of Americans, or 57 percent, oppose. While some prior polls have indicated limited support for so-called work requirements, CAP's most recent poll shows that support declines sharply when people understand the consequences of these policies—such as that people will lose needed health coverage if they can't find work. And now, the Trump administration is even considering allowing states to implement unprecedented lifetime limits on Medicaid coverage. Both of these heartless steps are in line with Speaker Ryan's long-held fantasy of ending the program [as we know it](#).

Simply put, Medicaid is a lifesaving program, and many Americans will die if these policies go into effect. While President Trump and Speaker Ryan may not care about the human impacts of their decisions, they might want to heed the political impacts on their party. Instead, as was reported earlier this month, Speaker Ryan is still trying to [sell his colleagues](#) not just on continuing to attack Medicaid, but also on slashing nearly every program that helps Americans afford the basics—from nutrition assistance to affordable housing and more. Congressional Republicans' persistence in attacking health care and other basics Americans depend on, along with President Trump's budget, make clear that this will continue to be an obsession for Republicans this year, next year, and every year after that—no matter how loudly the American people object.

Of course, it seems that Republicans are well aware of how unpopular their actions would be. Rep. Mark Walker (R-NC), chair of the Republican Study Committee, [candidly acknowledged](#) that they needed a new “buzz phrase” to help them rebrand their attacks. To that end, Speaker Ryan is attempting to cynically rebrand the GOP's cuts as “[workforce development](#)”—as though taking away someone's health care, food, or housing is a strategy to help them find work.

Even worse for Republicans, these wildly unpopular attacks on health care and the social safety net come against the backdrop of a Republican tax bill that the public understands to be tilted dramatically in favor of corporations and the rich, with many middle-class families ultimately paying the price. The new CAP polling found that a majority of Americans (52-45) recognizes these attacks on the social safety net specifically as a way for Republicans to offset the recent tax cuts for the wealthy.

Perhaps the most devastating critique of Republicans' partisan health care repeal bills—and what was central to their demise—was the fact that the bills stripped health care from tens of millions of Americans in order to fund tax cuts for the wealthy. By continuing their obsession with undermining health care and the social safety net, Republicans are ensuring that the most politically damaging attack against them becomes their party's identity going into November.