

**Senator Elizabeth Warren  
Remarks on the Senate Floor  
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**\*\*\*As Prepared for Delivery\*\*\***

Last week, Republicans in the House released a bill to repeal the Affordable Care Act and cut Medicaid to the bone.

On Tuesday, the Congressional Budget Office – those are the independent budget experts who analyze policies under consideration here in Congress – estimated that this plan would rip health insurance coverage away from 24 million Americans and cut \$880 billion from the Medicaid program. And as a bonus, the plan provides hundreds of billions in tax breaks for the rich.

Who comes up with a plan like this?

What kind of health care bill has as its central feature ripping insurance away from tens of millions of American citizens?

What kind of politician thinks they were sent to Congress to destroy the financial stability of millions – millions – of middle class families and give wealthy donors a tax break that they certainly don't need?

Who thinks the central problem in America is that middle class families have too much health care coverage and that the richest people in America need the government to hand them more money?

There's no other way to say it: this bill is just part of a Republican plan to help the rich get richer and kick dirt in everyone else's face.

This bill is an economic disaster, and, at its center, it is cruel. Cancer survivors losing coverage. Seniors facing premium increases of \$12,000 a year. People with disabilities forced into nursing homes.

One of the cruelest things is what this bill will do to individuals, to families and to communities struggling with the opioid crisis.

Last year in Massachusetts, nearly 2,000 people died from opioid use. That's more than *double* the number who died in 2013. That's right – double. Between 2014 and 2015, Massachusetts had a bigger jump in its death rate from drug overdoses than any other state except North Dakota.

Last week, I was on the front lines at Lynn Community Health Center where dedicated staffers are trying to meet the opioid epidemic head on.

This week I went to Manet Community Health Center where a coordinated team in Quincy is battling the opioid crisis.

While was there, I saw mamas and babies, people who are in recovery and people who reach out to those who are still in the grip of drugs. The opioid crisis isn't happening to someone else's family or in

someone else's community. This is happening to our families and in our communities. And we need to do more—more to stop this plague before it takes another of our loved ones.

We need to do more. What we absolutely cannot do is less. We cannot take away the resources we already commit to fighting the opioid crisis so that some millionaire can get a tax break.

Current law—the ACA—requires all insurance plans to cover substance use disorder treatment and prevention as an “essential health benefit.” That means your insurance company can't turn off your access to treatment just when you need it the most by saying, “Oh sorry – we don't cover that.”

Current law—the ACA—gave people the chance to *get* insurance. Through health exchanges and subsidies, millions more people got private insurance. And through Medicaid expansion, millions more were covered by Medicaid.

So there it is—our first line defense in the war on opioid addiction: The ACA currently means that more people are covered and that coverage includes substance abuse treatment.

And what do the Republicans plan to do? Take away coverage for 24 million people. That's 24 million people who no longer have any access to substance use disorder and prevention services. And then they want to let insurance companies jack up the out-of-pocket costs for substance abuse programs and mental health programs—in fact, some Medicaid plans would be able to drop this coverage altogether. So millions more people would lose their one lifeline if someone in their family is taken by drugs.

Don't get me wrong. What we're doing now isn't enough. Even now, only 10 percent of those who need treatment for substance use disorder receive it – 90 percent can't get help already! But that means we need more—not less—help.

Repealing the protections for mental health and substance use disorders in the ACA would yank more than \$5 billion—that's \$5 billion in actual funding that is currently going to mental health and treatment services. That's the Republican plan to deal with the opioid crisis.

Ask any family trying to get treatment for a loved one who is addicted to drugs: We already have an opioid treatment gap. Gutting the ACA is like shoving a stick of dynamite in the treatment gap and lighting the fuse.

And if the Republicans get their way, people will lose health coverage. People will lose access to recovery services. People will die.

Now is the time to stop this cruel bill in its tracks, before it hurts real people. Now is the time to speak out about the importance of the ACA and Medicaid to you and your family.

If you or someone you know has been touched by the opioid epidemic, you know how much this matters. Maybe you have a sister, or a child, or a church member, or a high school friend who has struggled with substance use disorder. Maybe you know someone who has fought on the front lines of this crisis as a health care provider, a community advocate, or a first responder. If you do, then you know the stakes of this debate over the ACA and Medicaid.

Now is the time to act. Don't wait. If the Republicans end up destroying help for millions of people, don't wake up the next morning and wonder if you could have said more or if you could have raised your voice back when it mattered. No, the Republicans are trying to pass this terrible health care bill, and now is the time to speak out.

It's time to stand up and tell the Republicans to end their cruel healthcare plan. Our families and our communities are counting on us, and we cannot let them down. Speak out.