

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Senator Cantwell at Tri-Cities Medicaid Press Conference

March 21st, 2025

Press Conference Remarks

[VIDEO]

Sen. Cantwell: Well, thank you everyone. I don't know how we could have had a better presentation about the effects of the proposed Medicaid budget cuts in Washington, DC. I want to thank Emily, certainly for Kadlec for allowing us to be here. Reza, thank you so much for communicating about how this affects Providence as a region. Our two doctors, Regina, well, all three, Regina and John and Richard, really explaining the impacts to the delivery system and why that could be so devastating.

I don't think everybody understands that. And so, you being here and saying what the impacts would be, means everything. And Everett, thanks for coming over from Walla Walla, and Brenda, thank you for the work you do. It's really amazing. And we need more caregivers, if they want to look for more savings, then they should look at community-based home care. That's what they should do. And help fund the kind of long-term care services that you're providing in individuals' homes. So, thank you so much for that.

Well, we're here today, obviously, because there is a fight in the other Washington: A proposal to cut Medicaid. I think there's a little bit of confusion today, because some people think, well, in the parlance of legislative process, somebody has just directed a committee to find \$880 billion of savings.

What they're not telling you is that [93%] of the money in those accounts comes from Medicaid. Even if you took all the money from the other 7% and got rid of it, which is health insurance program which I wouldn't get rid of, the universal rid of it, which is the Children's Health Insurance Program, which I wouldn't get rid of, the Universal Service Fund, which I wouldn't get rid of, and a variety of other things, you are still talking about a massive cut to Medicaid.

It is a tsunami. And trust me, this is not a drill. This is a real proposal, and we have to wake up the American people, and certainly here in Central Washington, to the devastating impacts they could see if Medicaid was cut. In Washington state we have about 1.8 million people on Medicaid. According to a report I released last month, Apple Health, which is the Medicaid name, covers 70% of Central Washington's children, and 38% of the region's total population. That's the highest Medicaid coverage in the State of Washington.

Here in Richland, the State Legislative District Sixteen, 60% of all kids are on Medicaid. Across the Yakima River, in District Eight, there are 49% of kids on Medicaid. To the west of us in Yakima County's Fifteenth District, 87% of kids, more than half of the population, are covered by Medicaid. That is the most of any of the legislative districts in our state.

So yes, Central Washington and our health care delivery system would be devastated by these proposed cuts. So now we have to say, “Stop with the fuzzy map. Stop with the proposal. And protect Medicaid.” I couldn't have said it better than these individual health care providers. They *know* what this would do to devastate our system. I guarantee you, health clinics would close, hospitals would find it hard to provide care, and as individuals have said here, people just would not get health care. As one woman in Spokane said to us at a similar forum, “What are they asking us? Are they asking us just to die.”

The point here is that there are ways to get even more efficient care, to invest more, to lower cost, and as was described, preventative care is a great example of that. We're not going to be saving money for anybody by gutting Medicaid. It's just not true.

We need to tell President Trump and Elon Musk, who is leading this effort, keep your hands off Medicaid, Social Security and Medicare. Cuts of this magnitude would take hope away from people who are literally fighting for their lives.

We have held press conferences in Seattle and in Spokane and right here in the Tri-Cities, and talked to people, who literally Medicaid is their only hope. Without Medicaid, how do you shoulder this financial burden for the whole family, for the hospital, for the community. Everybody would be affected as our emergency room physician, just so articulately advocated.

People would not be able to afford the cost to even fly across the state for things like children's hospital. We would not be able to help support those patients fighting for their lives on important things like cancer treatment. Some hospitals, literally in the Fourth Congressional District, would close. They just wouldn't be able to support themselves without the Medicaid reimbursement for uncompensated care.

For example, 58% of the Othello Community Hospital and 28% of the Grand Coulee Medical patients are on Apple Health. According to Grand Coulee Medical Center CEO, any reduction in Medicaid funding would force them to cut services, reduce staff, and potentially close their labor unit and delivery unit. So, without insurance or the ability to care for, what are some patients supposed to do? At our Spokane round table, a brave woman, Gail Halverson, stood up and said she relies on Medicaid, and so did her late partner. She said, if people can't get preventative care with Medicaid, they're just going to get sick, they're going to get sick, and then they'll have to go to a nursing home.

So, who's going to pay for the nursing home? Well, that's either Medicare or Medicaid. So, as she said, “What are you just asking us to do? Just die?” This shows that patients, doctors, hospitals, and everyone outside of the Beltway know that this is a very, very bad idea. They know now with the Medicaid expansion that it touches all our lives. It touches all walks of life, and it pays for 1/3 of childbirths in Washington state, and as our Walla Walla colleague just said, it's helping us fight the Fentanyl crisis.

I don't know what would happen to our communities or jails or any of these individuals if we didn't have that Medicaid treatment for fentanyl and trying to get people off of fentanyl in this crisis.

Our health care system today does save money. When you give people the freedom to see a doctor when they need to, instead of forcing them to wait until they absolutely have to. We cannot be shortsighted about these attempts that aren't about reducing costs, they're literally about destroying our health care system.

So, I encourage everyone to call their representatives, call your senators, call the White House, talk about how the Medicaid cuts should be off the table. They shouldn't even be being considered. They are too vital to our communities. We need to sound the alarm, because this debate will transpire in the next 30 days. I am convinced by the end of April that this proposal will either have been successful, or we will have been successful in defeating it. Now is the time to be aggressive. Thank you all very much.