

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Senators Cantwell and Booker Floor Exchange on Medicaid and Social Security
April 1st, 2025

[\[AUDIO\]](#) | [\[VIDEO\]](#)

Sen. Cantwell: Will the Senator from New Jersey yield for a question?

Sen. Booker: To my dear friend, I yield for a question while retaining the floor, and I thank you for being here, I thank you for your leadership, I thank you for what you stand for and look forward to your question.

Sen. Cantwell: I so appreciate the Senator from New Jersey trying to articulate the urgency of this moment, and I think that, I know you've discussed many things in the last I don't know how many hours it is, but it's been many, many hours.

And we just had a hearing this morning related to the markup of the Social Security nominee, somebody we're just trying to find out because a whistleblower said that he was involved in helping DOGE. We're here today trying to bring attention to the American public that people are trying to rearrange essential services, contractual obligations, things like Social Security, Medicaid, or even Medicare by basically saying we have this efficiency strategy -- when in reality, they're over there with numbers just trying to carve something out of the budget.

Billions of dollars out of Social Security efficiency, billions and billions and billions of dollars out of Medicaid, which would really come right out of our hospitals. We're saying we don't even think they can stay open. But this notion of Social Security, I don't know if you've heard that not only are they closing offices and cutting jobs, they're asking people to re-register.

So my constituent, who they basically said was dead, was not dead. He wanted his Social Security. So not only did they not give him his check in January, they tried to clawback checks from the previous months out of his bank account. And even though this has gotten national press and attention, you would think that everybody on the other side would be like, 'no, that's not what we're trying to do,' even though the President at his State of the Union, said all these people were getting Social Security checks when my constituent was standing in line with less and less staff trying to get his Social Security. And guess what? They're still at it.

As of last Friday, they were still at not giving him his Social Security. So what are we unleashing on America? What are we unleashing that even -- and I don't know whether you addressed the Social Security issues in your statements -- I so appreciate you emphasizing the urgency here, because this is the dismantling of contractual agreements between the American people and the people's body that we're here to represent them and stand up for it, and people are acting like they don't care. So you are here in an extraordinary athletic achievement -- thank you. It makes your Stanford days look like nothing. You've achieved this great, long effort to bring illumination to the American people that they're getting screwed over the fact that these cuts are not some efficient way to deliver better service, but in Social Security, they're undermining Social Security.

So have you heard of these cases -- the whistleblower issue and others? And do you believe that's what we should be paying attention to? That before we get a vote on Mr. Bisignano, we should be finding out what whistleblowers are saying and his involvement relating to DOGE and making sure social security checks are protected?

Sen. Booker: I thank you for the question, my friend and my Chairwoman, I did talk about this, but it is so worth repeating. At some point in the night, we covered Social Security. We read story after story after story of senior citizens that are frightened and afraid that the president of the United States would stand in a joint address and attack Social Security, make fun of it with lie after lie after lie about millions and millions of people getting fraudulent checks. When the people who do the fact-checking, and even the Social Security folks themselves, say it is a minuscule amount of people getting checks, and usually it's an overpayment.

But they didn't stop there. Elon Trump called it a Ponzi scheme -- Elon Musk called it a Ponzi scheme. The richest man in the world and the most powerful man in the world, himself a billionaire, are attacking the programs that millions and millions of our citizens rely on.

I read letters of people that say don't forget about the people who are disabled who rely on SSI. Begging us to remember and speak their names and tell their stories. A lot of fear, a lot of terror, a lot of insecurity. But we spoke about this on the floor that the benefits are already being cut. What do I mean by that? Well, if you are cutting Social Security offices, as one of our colleagues said from New Hampshire, in a rural area, forcing people to have to drive 100 miles.

If they have a problem, they can't talk on the phone or the waits on the phones, I read an article from the Wall Street Journal, no left-wing mag, from the Wall Street Journal talking about how the customer service is going downhill because of the cuts that they're making, and now you're forcing seniors -- we read letters from 85-year olds, 90-year olds, 93-year-olds --they're going to drive 100 miles?

I read letters from Social Security workers who work in inadequate spaces, with inadequate staff, unable to do the job they love. They're not leeches. They're not people that should be demeaned or degraded by the most powerful people in our land. They are public servants who love their jobs and want to serve seniors, but now can't do it because they cut, cut, cut, before they thought, thought, thought.

I will yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Sen. Cantwell: I thank the Senator from New Jersey. The issue I think not being illuminated enough are the sheer numbers here, in my State of Washington, 1.4 million people on Social Security, 1.8 million people on Medicaid. So, you're talking about a big federal relationship.

I actually worked in the private sector. I can tell you one thing about the private sector, the bigger it gets, usually, the more inefficient it gets. It just happens. Big organizations can be inefficient.

Just because the federal government is the government, doesn't mean that Social Security and Medicaid are fraught with fraud. In this case, my constituent's not getting his check, and no one is responding. And you would think with all this commotion, Social Security would want to jump right on it and fix it -- but they're not.

The question I have for the Senator from New Jersey is in my state, I have, as I said, [over 1.9 million] people who are on Medicaid, and the same problem is now where our colleagues are trying to say they're going to get \$880 billion out of the Energy and Commerce budgets of the House of Representatives, when in reality like 90% of that money is Medicare and Medicaid. And if Medicare is off the table, then the majority of that is going to come from Medicaid.

So in my state, I'm hearing from hospitals that that means they could close, that means essential Medicaid services that are used even in our jails or for fentanyl treatment or Medicaid that is used as an Obamacare expansion for health care, that so many -- literally, red Republican states, Republican Governors, have said we want that. The Governor of Idaho, yes, we want that.

That's an expansion of Medicaid, and it's successfully working at providing health care to millions of Americans. But now our colleagues are entertaining a notion they could cut this system. They're not really making it clear.

Again, the illumination of you showing the urgency is like a big flag that we're trying to show to the American people. This is not a drill. This is now. This is happening -- the beginnings of it are happening. And now this debate that's going to ensue is going to be a massive cut into those programs unless the American people wake up.

Now, are you hearing this in New Jersey about the Medicaid cuts, the impacts on hospitals, on the delivery system, on essential services?

Sen. Booker: I cannot emphasize to you strongly enough, we decided to start this whole thing at 7:00 P.M. last night with Medicaid, and we read story after story after story after story of people who are Medicaid beneficiaries who are terrified, who are afraid, who didn't say if they cut \$880 billion, if they diminish the cuts in any way to their services, they're holding together their lives in this fragile financial equilibrium, that one little tug -- if a transportation service, one little tug of a home health care giver, it all crumbles. They're terrified and afraid.

Some of the Americans are dealing with the greatest challenges, not of their own making. Some of them working full time jobs and getting an injury, it costs extraordinary amounts of chaos to their lives. So yes, I read from the people who are recipients. I read from the people who run hospitals, from rural hospitals to urban hospitals to level one trauma centers, who all said that if they cut hundreds of billions of dollars, that it will affect them.

I did something really important. I read from Republican governors and Democratic governors, because I keep saying over and over America, this is not right or left. It's right or wrong. It's not a partisan moment. It's an American moment. It's a moral moment.

I read voices from Republicans, specifically Republican governors in Medicaid expansion states, they have this trigger. You know this -- in many states that if the funding from the federal law of

government over dips below 90% -- boom. Medicare expansion is over, millions of people in financial crisis, in health care crisis.

What is it going to take for us to say 'no' with such a firm voice, such a chorus of conviction – thousands, hundreds of thousands of Americans -- red, white and blue, every state saying, do not do this for no good reason but to give the majority of your tax cuts to billionaires like Elon Musk. It makes no sense.

Who are we as a country? This is not normal times. This is not usual. We should be standing up because I read the stories of Republicans who run hospitals, Republicans who are governors, who are all saying, 'Don't do this. Don't do this.' You. a chorus of conviction, thousands, hundreds of thousands of Americans, red, white, and blue, every state saying do not do this, for no good reason but to give the majority of your tax cuts to billionaires like Elon Musk. It makes no sense. Who are we as a country? This is not normal times. This is not usual. We should be standing up. Because I read the stories of Republicans who run hospitals, Republicans who are governors, who are all saying don't do this. Don't do this.