

Mitch McConnell Office Visit January 26, 2018

Synopsis—On January 12, 2018, Senator McConnell released the following statement: ***“I applaud CMS and Governor Bevin for recognizing the unaffordable mess left behind by his predecessor and responding with innovative, common-sense steps to engage patients, improve health, and reduce the burden on Kentucky taxpayers. Today’s announcement by CMS is a step toward taking the power out of Washington and sending it back to the state while also ensuring the long term fiscal sustainability of the Medicaid program.”***¹ This statement raises a number of concerns related to health care and the Senator’s failure to represent the interests of his constituents. First, expanded Medicaid was paid for by increases in Medicare taxes, primarily on the wealthiest Americans.² States are only expected to pay up to 10% of the cost of Medicaid expansion by 2020, unlike traditional Medicaid in which the State is expected to pay 30-35% of its cost for patients.³ Second, Kentucky has one of the worst states in health, ranking 44-45 out of 50.⁴ Third, increased health care coverage has a significant positive effect on the financial well-being of those who receive it.⁵ More importantly, because it increases the use of medical resources by the poorest, it allows for early detection of disease, treatment and prevention of death.⁵ The estimated cost saved by expanded Medicaid is under \$1 million/human life saved, far below the estimated break-even point of \$6-8 million/human life used by government agencies in official cost-benefit analyses.⁵⁻⁶ To suggest Kentuckians will have improved health by engaging them with such a program belies the real purpose revealed by a Bevin aid which is to cut Medicaid benefits to 95,000 Kentuckians in 5 years.⁷ The only thing this ensures is that fewer people receive health care coverage. This follows other efforts by McConnell and Bevin to find solutions to social problems not by the expenditure of tax resources, but by telling people what to do. In short, if you are poor you must be told what to do and prove you are doing as you are told, and if you are wealthy, well, you do enough already. This raises the following questions for McConnell:

Questions

- 1. Although 57 million Americans have no emergency savings of even \$1,000, and 7 million Americans have zero savings for an emergency⁸, the Bevin plan will charge Medicaid recipients up to \$180/yr for Medicaid benefits. Benefits currently extended only to those who make between \$16,800 - \$26,600/yr depending on size of household (one to three members). Those making less than \$30,000/yr are more than twice as likely as those making over \$50,000 to not have any emergency savings.⁹ Does McConnell believe poor people in Kentucky are poor because they are lazy or just don’t care to work hard enough to make more money to live? Does he honestly believe asking them to be “more responsible and engaged” is going to solve their financial issues, or just make it easier for his wealthy donors to feel less uncomfortable about their own lack of responsibility and obligations to others in our society?***
- 2. McConnell voted last year to end the health insurance mandate that will end coverage for about 13 million Americans.¹⁰⁻¹¹ He has voted against raising the minimum wage multiple times.¹²⁻¹³ What has McConnell done to improve conditions for his constituents that would actually allow them to make more money, so they could afford health insurance? What has he done to lower their financial distress by ensuring they don’t have to worry about how to pay for a major medical problem other than blaming others for their problems?***
- 3. Social policies, regulations and legislation should be supported by studies that show their implementation would improve conditions and not make a bad situation worse. What proof does McConnell have that shows demanding more of poor people regarding their responsibility for working, engaging them and demanding proof from them about what they have done each month will in any way improve their health instead of making their problems worse? Why does McConnell believe Medicaid should be a combined work-health program instead of just a health program for the poorest Americans as originally intended?***

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4. ***Why should Kentuckians trust anything McConnell says in view of his penchant for the worst kinds of hypocrisy¹⁴⁻¹⁷, his damage to the Senate as a cooperative, deliberative and compromising legislative body¹⁸, and his full-on embrace of party over country and even party before national security interests¹⁹⁻²¹?***

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