



Senator Peter Welch
Remarks as Delivered
On How Republicans' Cruel Budget Will Hurt Health Care in Rural America
June 23, 2025

There is time to kill this bill—and I hope we do. You know, as my colleague from Hawaii just said—what's happening in this bill is the infliction of bipartisan suffering. Whether it's in the State of Vermont, or the State of West Virginia, or the State of Tennessee, folks who are depending on Medicaid are going to lose it.

Let me just give a couple of examples. When I was in the House, my good friend David McKinley—Republican—invited me to West Virginia. And we went to the Harrison Coal Mine. And I was very deeply moved because the only people I know who work as hard as coal miners are dairy farmers. So, we have a lot in common: hardworking folks in Vermont, hardworking folks in West Virginia.

But what this bill is going to do is threaten the access to health care that those West Virginia folks need just like those folks in Vermont need. Just like those folks in Tennessee need. It is not about whether you're a Republican or Democrat. It's not about whether you're from a red or blue state. It's actually about real people who work in coal mines, who work on dairy farms, who work in factories.

Seniors who need the help of nursing homes. Two out of three nursing home beds are paid for by Medicaid. Parents and disabled children so depend on health care, especially through Medicaid. And that's true in West Virginia. It's true in Nebraska. It's true in Tennessee, just as it is in Vermont.

Let me just give a few numbers. In Vermont, 32,000 people—32,000 people—are going to lose health care if this bill is passed. In West Virginia, 76,000 people will lose their health care coverage. In Tennessee, it's going to be 290,000 people who are going to lose their health care. It's not just those individuals who are going to lose health care. This budget reconciliation bill, the 'Big Beautiful Bill,' the big, bad betrayal.

There's real consequences to this that are going to be devastating to rural America. And we have a lot in common in Vermont with so many other parts of rural America like West Virginia and like Tennessee. Rural hospitals will close, and people will be forced to travel for their care so far that they oftentimes won't be able to get it. And the sad reality? You take away people's health care, they're going to get sick and stay sick. You take away people's health care, and people are—people are—going to die.

You know, the American Hospital Association showed that this bill will likely close 338 hospitals in rural communities across the entire country—in your state and in mine. In Vermont, the fear is three out of 14 hospitals are at risk of closure with the passage of this bill. In West Virginia, seven hospitals are at the risk of closure. And in Tennessee, nine hospitals will be immediately at the risk of closure.

You know what happens, too—and it's like we don't even debate this. We don't even discuss it when this reality is about to strike a hammer blow to folks in rural America. If people lose their health care, it doesn't mean they don't need health care. It just means they can't pay for health care.

So, folks in Vermont who were depending on Medicaid are going to show up at our rural hospitals. Our hospitals are under a legal requirement to provide care. By the way, they would provide care even without a legal requirement because that's what we do in rural America. We hope folks who need help. But those hospitals already on a thin margin are not going to be able to afford it, and that's what threatens to have them go out of business. And then we know the spiral.

This bill in Vermont is going to result in over \$200 million in uncompensated care in the next ten years. In West Virginia, it's \$1.4 billion. In Tennessee it's over \$3.5 billion. These rural hospitals, they provide critical care to people in need. We've got to protect the people first. We take away their hospitals, they have no protection. We've got to protect the struggles that communities in rural America have to keep a strong community sense against the enormous pressures that they face.

There's a cruelty in this bill. There's an irresponsibility in the Senate if we don't acknowledge explicitly what the impact of this bill will be on the people we represent, on the hospitals that are dependent on us, and on the future of community strength in all of our rural communities. Let's kill this bill.

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