



**Senator Peter Welch  
Opening Remarks as Delivered**

**Senate Finance Committee Hearing  
*The President's 2026 Health Care Agenda*  
September 4, 2025**

Mr. Chairman, thank you. I want to sum up, and I want to make three points. First, we have a health care affordability crisis in this country. And second, Secretary Kennedy's policies are making that affordability crisis worse, not better. And third, Mr. Chairman, the United States Senate is not doing its job.

Health care—citizens of the United States, our employers, our taxpayers, and our families pay the most and get the least. That has been persistent and chronic, and it's not being addressed. It's being aggravated.

Let me be specific. In Vermont, a family of four that makes \$82,000 in income with premium support on Obamacare now pays \$6,970 for their health care premium. That is going to increase \$23,000 to \$30,000. That is unaffordable, it's shocking, and it's cruel.

The '*Big Beautiful Bill*,' that we're talking about...Vermonters are going to lose—45,000 families lose health care. That is going to be a hammer blow to our hospitals, because those folks who lose health care don't get a guarantee they won't get sick. And they're going to show up at our community hospitals. Our community hospitals are going to treat them, and they aren't going to be compensated. And it's why Vermont community hospitals are on a financial thin ice. And that's true about 338 hospitals around our country [that] are in danger of closing.

Second, Mr. Chairman, I believe the Secretary made assurances to this committee and he has not kept the promises he made. Prices have not come down, they've gone up. He assured Senator Cassidy that he would not change the standards for vaccine review. Yet, since his confirmation, all 17 members of the vaccine advisory board have been fired by him. He has limited the use of the COVID-19 vaccine, and he has inexplicably canceled \$500 million in vaccine research and funding.

So, you know, I'm not surprised Stephen Miller credited you with being the 'crown jewel' of the cabinet. In my observation about the 'crown jewel' of the cabinet—and the

policies of the folks who get rewarded—are the ones who fire those in service who speak truth to power.

Susan Monarez—we've gone over that—fired because she refused to fire her staff without cause and refused rubber-stamp changes to the vaccine schedule without data. The head of the Bureau of Labor Statistics was fired because she gave a report with honest numbers about the job report. CIA Russia expert who had been there for 30 years, fired after the meeting with Putin.

So, Mr. [Chairman], that is serious and worrisome. But I want to finally end by challenging us in the United States Senate to do our job. We have a constitutional responsibility to be a check and balance. And the fear of our founders was that there would be a concentration of power in one branch, and that would lead to catastrophic consequences for our country.

And what has Congress done? On oversight, and advice and consent, we have confirmed a vaccine denier. On tariffs, we've given up our constitutional responsibility. On appropriations, we're bending the knee to an Administration that is rescinding and decided what to spend and what not to spend despite the way our law—in a bipartisan way—was passed.

We cannot cede power, and there are consequences: a crumbling health care center system, a deficit exploding, and our allies losing faith in us.

You know, Mr. Secretary, in the past you have accused some of my colleagues of being in the pocket of Pharma: 'Pharma shills.' You did that with Senator Warren today, you've done it in the past with Senator Bennet and Senator Sanders. You are not a 'Pharma shill,' but I believe we have to fight Pharma and bring down the prices.

And Senator Cortez Masto spoke about the legislation that we now have that would reverse the \$500 billion hand out to Big Pharma in the *One Big Beautiful Bill*. And when I leave today with Senator Wyden, we are going to go to the floor and seek unanimous consent to pass our legislation that would reverse that giveaway.

And I ask you to put your policy and your body where your mouth is and join us in supporting that bill to restore price negotiation power so those Pharma prices can come down from being the highest in the world to something within range of reason.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

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