Opinion
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U.S. President Donald Trump speaks during a cabinet meeting at the White House in Washington, April 30, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Evelyn Hockstein)



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President Donald Trump is strong-arming Republican members of Congress to support a massive bill that would deliver massive tax cuts to the rich, steep cuts in Medicaid for the poor and disabled, and additional funds to pay for Trump's mass deportation plans.

The short-term politics of securing enough votes is complicated. Last week, four conservatives on the House Budget Committee voted against the legislation, keeping it from going to the full House for consideration. On Sunday, they switched their vote to "present" allowing the bill to proceed without their consent. They are rightly worried that the measure will balloon the already bloated deficit, but additional spending cuts would risk losing the support of moderate Republicans running in swing districts.

Mercy Sr. Mary Haddad, who leads the Catholic Health Association, has warned that the House proposals "includes harmful policies and hundreds of billions of dollars in cuts to the federal Medicaid program, threatening access to care for millions of Americans — particularly those in underserved areas where our member systems work every single day to provide quality, compassionate care."

"Medicaid is not just a health program — it is a lifeline," Haddad continued. "It provides access to care for those who need it most — poor and vulnerable children, pregnant women, elderly, adults, and disabled individuals in our nation while ensuring their dignity."

Many people may not realize the variety of programs that are funded through Medicaid. A friend runs a nonprofit group that helps families with children with disabilities connect with programs that can help them. That friend explained to me that many of the programs for autistic children are funded through Medicaid, and if those programs are cut, one of the child's parents will need to quit their job to care for the child, and the benefits to the autistic child of being with others will be lost.

Anyone who has dealt with long-term care options for their parents knows that Medicaid keeps our nation's nursing homes afloat. Medicare usually covers the first six months of nursing home care after a hospitalization but, after that, Medicaid kicks in.

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Both groups that stand to be harmed by Medicaid cuts — the elderly and the disabled — are found in every community and in all demographic groups. Democrats should be mounting local ad campaigns that highlight nursing homes and disabled care programs in local communities, and the threat posed to them by these cuts.

Interview religious sisters who work at Catholic nursing homes. Interview veterans and their families who depend on Medicaid programs. Talk with young families struggling to get help with their disabled child. If these reckless budget cuts are to be stopped, the Democrats need to put a human face on them.

And, while they are putting a human face on the budget cuts that harm the poor, the Democrats need to make sure they put a human face on the tax cuts that benefit the superrich. How much money will Elon Musk save if this bill becomes law? Make his mug the face of this bill and it will instantly become less popular.

The vote on this legislation is not happening in a vacuum. Trump's economic performance has been one disaster after another. The chaos surrounding the imposition of tariffs has subsided, but they remain "the largest peacetime tax hike ... in the history of the country," as Mike Pence told NBC News, saying out loud what many other Republicans were thinking. Moody's decision to downgrade the nation's credit rating may not have rattled GOP congresspeople, but it rattled their voters. Soon, gas prices will go up as they do every summertime.

The opposition to the president has failed to craft and articulate a consistent message. Too often, the Democrats follow Trump's lead, chasing the latest, daily foolish thing he has done, before he does something different the next day. For him, chaos is part of the strategy.

The Democrats need to demonstrate discipline. This "big beautiful bill" is big, but it isn't beautiful. It is unfair, cutting programs that help struggling families to provide tax cuts to rich people who don't even need it. It does nothing to help people struggling with higher prices for gas and groceries. It makes the deficit larger. There is no economic problem that the nation faces that will not be made worse by this bill.

Most of all, the Democrats need to put human faces on the policies being cut and the tax cuts being expanded.

Americans believe all sorts of crazy things about how the economy works. Economists themselves believe the craziest things! The only path for the Democrats is to constantly remind people that the economy is about real people with real problems, that there is a human cost to bad policies and human benefits to good ones. Measuring economic growth tells you nothing about the human misery or flourishing a particular economy produces. Humanizing the economy should become the central focus of the Democrats' brand.

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. View the full series.