

## Statement of Senator Sanders on Budget Reconciliation

### December 1, 2015

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Mr. President, as the ranking member of the budget committee, I rise in strong opposition to the budget reconciliation bill that we are debating today. In fact, this bill should tell every American just how far removed the republican leadership here in congress is from the realities of American life and the needs of the American people.

At a time when The United States is the only major country on earth that does not guarantee health care to all people, when 29 million Americans today have no health insurance and even more are underinsured with high deductibles and high co-payments, when we pay the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs and when one out of five Americans are unable to fill the prescriptions written by their doctors because drug prices are so high, what this legislation does is move us in exactly the wrong direction. It would throw more than 17 million Americans off of health insurance by gutting the Affordable Care Act. So we have a health care crisis and this bill makes the crisis much worse.

Every other major country on earth guaranteed health care for all of their people but this bill would add 17 million more Americans to the ranks of the uninsured, creating a situation in which we would have 46 million Americans without any health insurance at all. Now, I think any sensible person would ask an obvious question: what happens to people who lose their health insurance? How many of those people will get much sicker than they otherwise should have because they were unable to go to a doctor when they needed to go? How many of those people will not be able to get the prescription drugs they need? In fact, how many of those people will die? And let's be frank. When you throw 17 million people off of health insurance, people will die because they don't go to a doctor when they should, they don't get into the hospital when they should.

We know that before the passage of the affordable care act, 45,000 Americans died each year because they lacked health insurance and didn't get to a doctor on time. I have talked to many doctors in Vermont and throughout this country who tell me, yes, of course, people walk into the door – their door much sicker than they should have been. And when the doctor says, why didn't you come six months ago when you were sick? They said, well, I don't have any insurance. And by the time they walk into the door, it is too late. That is not what should be happening in America. But that is what will increasingly happen if this legislation were to pass.

Mr. President, in The United States of America, when you are sick, you should be able to access health care and see a doctor. That is not a radical idea. And when you go to the hospital, you should not end up in bankruptcy. Instead of throwing 17 million Americans off of health insurance, what we should be doing is expanding on the improvements of the affordable care act to make health care a right of all people, not just a privilege.

Further, let us be clear -- and I think everybody here in the senate understands this -- the bill we are debating today is a complete waste of time. This is just another reason why the American people have so little respect for the congress. There are major crises facing our country, and the Republican leadership once again is attempting to repeal Obamacare. I kind of lost track about how many times this effort has been made. I think in the house -- it was over 50. I don't know how many times it is here in the senate. So let me break the news to my Republican colleagues, although I am sure they already got the news. That is, Obama is not going to sign a bill repealing Obamacare. I think that is not likely to happen. And what we are doing today is just a waste of time. And let's also be clear, this bill doesn't just gut the Affordable Care Act, it also eliminates funding for Planned Parenthood, which provides health care services to nearly 3 million women each and every year.

Last week three people were killed and nine were wounded at a shooting at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado Springs, Colorado. While we still don't have all of the details as to what motivated the shooter, what is clear is that planned parenthood has been the subject of vicious and unsubstantiated statements, attacking an organization that provides critical care for millions of Americans and, in fact, provides very high-quality care. I, for one, strongly support Planned Parenthood and the work that it is doing. In my view, instead of trying to defund Planned Parenthood, we should be expanding funding so that every woman in this country gets the health care that she needs.

Mr. President, it is also my sincere hope that people throughout this country, including my colleagues here in the Senate and across the capitol in the House, understand that bitter vitriolic rhetoric can have serious, unintended consequences. Now is not the time to continue a witch-hunt for an organization that provides critical health care services, from reproductive health care to cancer screenings and preventive services to millions of Americans. No one is forced to seek care at Planned Parenthood. It is a choice, a choice millions of women make freely and proudly.

Mr. President, this is -- this legislation is not only bad legislation and it is not only a waste of time, because if it's passed, it will be vetoed, but what it also tells the American people is that the Republican leadership is not prepared to discuss or to address the major crises facing our country. Just today a report came out, the top 20 wealthiest people in this country own more wealth than the bottom half of the American people. 20 people ... 150 million people. The level of wealth inequality in America is grotesque and unacceptable. Not one word in this bill addresses that issue.

Mr. President, today in America millions of our people are working longer hours for lower wages. They're working two or three jobs just to survive. And yet 58% of all new income created is going to the top one percent. Is there anything in this legislation that would raise wages for millions of American workers who are struggling to keep their families solvent? So, Mr. President, this is a bad piece of legislation. It's a piece of legislation that is not going to go anywhere because it's going to be vetoed. And it's a piece of legislation I think that speaks to why the American people are giving up in so many ways on the political process.

People are struggling all over this country. They are hurting. They're working longer hours for lower wages. They can't afford to send their kids to college. They can't afford child care. They're worried about high unemployment. And this bill attempts to repeal Obamacare. That's where we are. So, Mr. President, I hope very strongly that this bill is defeated. If it is not defeated, I hope and expect the president will veto it. With that, I yield the floor.