

June 30, 2017

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6300

Dear Senator Alexander:

I am writing to you in your position as Chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, a committee on which I also serve.

In my view, the current Republican health care proposal is a disaster. We must finally have serious discussion on this legislation.

The American people want open debate and hearings as to how we can improve the Affordable Care Act, not ways to destroy it through backroom deals made in Senator McConnell's office. On an issue which impacts one-sixth of our economy, and the lives of every American, people want to hear from doctors, nurses, hospitals and other healthcare professionals as to what the Republican plan means for their health and the health of their families. They do not want to see votes bought behind closed doors.

The American people want to know why the Trump-McConnell "health care" bill should be rushed through Congress when it is opposed by virtually every major health care organization in this country. These groups include the AARP, the American Hospital Association, the American Medical Association, the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychiatric Association, the Federation of American Hospitals, the Catholic Health Association, the American Lung Association, the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, the March of Dimes, the National MS Society, and the American Nurses Association.

The American people want to know why the Trump-McConnell "health care" bill should be rushed through Congress when it would cause, according to numerous studies, the needless deaths of many thousands of Americans.

The American people want to understand why the Trump-McConnell "health care" bill should be rushed through Congress when it would provide \$500 billion in tax breaks to the top two percent and the big drug and insurance companies while throwing 22 million Americans off of health care and slashing Medicaid.

The American people want to understand why the Trump-McConnell “health care” bill should be rushed through Congress when it would force older workers to pay five times as much for health care as anyone else.

The American people want to understand why the Trump-McConnell “health care” bill should be rushed through Congress when it would cut nursing home care for tens of thousands of the most vulnerable senior citizens in this country.

The American people want to know why the Trump-McConnell “health care” bill should be rushed through Congress when, in the midst of an opioid epidemic, it could result in hundreds of thousands of Americans losing the substance abuse treatment they need to beat their addiction.

The American people want to know why the Trump-McConnell “health care” bill should be rushed through Congress when it would deny 2.5 million women the health care they need by defunding Planned Parenthood.

The American people want to know why the Trump-McConnell “health care” bill should be rushed through Congress when it would take us back to the days when insurance companies could deny people with cancer and other pre-existing conditions the care they need.

The American people want to know why the Trump-McConnell “health care” bill should be rushed through Congress when it does not do anything to address the fact that the American people pay, by far, the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs.

Instead of holding backroom meetings, Senator McConnell, you and the Republican leadership must allow bi-partisan discussion as to how we improve the Affordable Care Act, not destroy it. I urge you to open up the process and allow the voices of more than just Republicans in the Senate to be heard.

Nobody believes the Affordable Care Act is perfect and does not need improvements. In my view long-term, we need to join every major country on earth and guarantee health care as a right through a Medicare-for-all single payer system.

Over the short-term, we need to lower the Medicare eligibility age to 55, provide a public option in every state, and substantially lower prescription drug prices.

You may well disagree with those policy ideas, and that's your right, but you shouldn't disagree that we should have that debate. Let's begin the national discussion. Let's have hearings. Let's end backroom deals.

Sincerely,



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator