



Duckworth: Illinoisans Deserve Better Than Having GOP Strip Away Their Healthcare Behind Closed Doors

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– U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) delivered a speech on the Senate floor today outlining the devastating impact Trumpcare would have on Veterans, seniors, and working families. Duckworth criticized Senate Republicans for writing their health care bill in secret behind closed doors to avoid public scrutiny and she shared the story of Robin Schmidt, a Veteran from the Northside of Chicago, who is one of the tens of millions of Americans who could lose their healthcare if Trumpcare becomes law.

Here are her remarks as prepared for delivery:

Over the past few years, the Affordable Care Act has made tremendous strides in expanding health care coverage for hard-working Americans and families who need it.

While the law could certainly be improved, the way to do that is not by passing Trumpcare, which even President Trump has admitted is “a MEAN bill.”

Unfortunately, Republican Senate leadership has indicated whatever it is that the Republicans are crafting in secret behind closed doors – it’s going to be very similar to the version of Trumpcare that passed the House.

That’s simply bad news. The version of Trumpcare that passed the House would cause 23 million Americans, including 385,000 Illinoisans, to lose health care coverage.

It would make it more expensive for older Americans and working people, especially those with pre-existing conditions, to purchase insurance. Trumpcare would cause their premiums and their out-of-pocket costs to skyrocket.

The average Illinoisans’ premiums would increase by \$700!

Trumpcare would also make critical services like maternity care for new moms and mental health and substance abuse services, significantly more expensive even though they are desperately needed.

That's extremely mean-spirited.

Making matters worse, it would also put Veterans on the chopping block.

Specifically, Trumpcare would prohibit Veterans who are eligible for VA health care from receiving tax credits to help them afford insurance in the individual marketplace.

However, there's a big difference between being eligible for VA health care and being enrolled in VA. Often times that's not even a choice you can make.

According to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, as many as 7 million of our Veterans are eligible for VA care but not enrolled. Preventing them from receiving tax credits would amount to a massive tax hike that would force them to pay thousands of dollars extra each year. That's not just mean, it's unacceptable.

There's been ample reporting indicating that Congressional Republicans knew exactly what they were doing.

They could have included a fix to this but purposely did not because that would have made their bill ineligible to be considered under the Senate's Budget Reconciliation process – which only requires 51 votes.

That's because, to remedy this huge flaw, the Veterans tax credit language would need to be considered in committees of jurisdiction.

And that would entail holding public hearings and markups in committees, which would then reveal to the American people what exactly is in the Republican bill.

Apparently, the cost of public scrutiny is too high for Senate Republican leaders who are willing to raise taxes behind veterans so they can hide this bad bill from the American people.

As a result, the appalling flaws in their bill remain unfixed – and 7 million Veterans remain on the chopping block.

That's not the only way Trumpcare would harm Veterans either. Its massive cuts to Medicaid would have a direct impact on Veterans, since nearly 2 million Veterans across our country, including 60,000 Veterans in my home state of Illinois, rely on Medicaid for their health care coverage.

That's 1 in 10 Veterans.

For nearly 1 million of these Veterans, Medicaid is their only source of coverage. Many of them are eligible for VA care only for the injuries they sustain in the military but not for any of their health needs.

I shouldn't have to remind my colleagues that Veterans are at a higher risk for serious health issues because of the sacrifices they have made for our nation.

Yet if Trumpcare becomes law, many of them will lose their coverage that they gained from Medicaid expansion under the ACA.

Right now, 13 Republican Senators are sitting behind closed doors, in some secret room on Capitol Hill, gambling with the lives of millions of Americans and people who have honorably served their country.

One of those lives belongs to Robin Schmidt, a Veteran from the Northside of Chicago.

Robin served during Desert Storm in Army Military Intelligence.

Robin loved her job in the military because it had always been her dream to serve her country.

As a 13-year-old girl, Robin stood at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall right here in Washington, DC, and knew that serving her country was her true calling.

However, she was eventually forced to end her military career, because in her words "the army refused to allow my husband to come back overseas to live with me."

So when she was pregnant with her child, she was forced to leave the military in order to return home to Arkansas to be with her husband to raise their children. When she was stateside and the VA denied her benefits, because they were not service connected, thus forcing her and her husband to pay the cost of maternity care and childbirth out of pocket she faced medical complications and developed endometriosis a pre-existing condition, and had to have a cesarean section during delivery.

After she delivered her baby, she ended up with \$500,000 in hospital debt.

This enormous debt followed Robin and her husband throughout their marriage, and it eventually left them in divorce, medical bankruptcy and with all of the repercussions that come from extreme financial hardship.

She was also blocked from accessing affordable health coverage because of her pre-existing condition and could not afford good coverage on an \$8.50 an hour wage, so she went without care.

Robin remained uninsured for a total of 22 years until she remarried, and gained health coverage under her husband's insurance.

This was especially devastating, because, in 2007, Robin was diagnosed with cancer.

And even though Robin was covered by her husband's insurance, insurance companies were not required to cover chemotherapy in 2007 and chemotherapy was too expensive for Robin and her family to pay out of pocket.

So she had to choose debilitating surgeries.

And after her cancer diagnosis, she developed severe auto-immune arthritis.

Her auto-immune treatments started at \$5,000 a month and soon increased to \$14,000 a month.

Insurance companies wanted Robin to pay for her medications upfront, with no guarantee of reimbursement.

As her medical costs grew and grew, Robin had to choose between her medical care or her mortgage payment.

After the Affordable Care Act became law, insurance companies were mandated to cover Robin's medications and treatments. They were no longer able to refuse her the medications she needed.

Her insurance premium prior to the Affordable Care Act was \$1,600 a month – which was more than her family paid for their monthly mortgage and household bills.

Now she pays just \$300 a month for her entire family.

There was no more red tape, constant stress, and fear that she might not be able to walk, or worse – might not be able to stay alive.

Unfortunately, the coverage, relief, and peace of mind that the ACA brought to Robin and her family is now under attack by Congressional Republicans.

And Robin is afraid that if Trumpcare becomes law, she will once again become nothing more than an uninsurable, pre-existing condition.

She's afraid she would be considered a high-risk pool patient, who will be able to have health insurance, but will not be able to actually afford any of her treatments.

She's afraid that if Republicans push through Trumpcare she will not be able to walk, work and will have absolutely no quality of life.

Robin's dream was to serve her country in our Armed Forces.

She took two oaths to serve this country and kept those oaths – a promise that she would defend this great nation.

Robin may not be in uniform anymore, but she certainly deserves that we in Congress, and here in the Senate defend her right to access quality health care.

For Robin, for nearly 7 million Veterans, middle-class families, our seniors and some of our most vulnerable Americans – I urge my Republican counterparts to stop these secret negotiations, take repeal off the table and work with Democrats to improve our health care system.

Just like Robin, each of these Americans have a story, a family and a valued place in society.

Robin's family and all Americans deserve better than having their coverage stripped away from them behind closed doors.

Thank you.