

To Patients, Parents, and Caregivers, Proposed Medicaid Cuts Are a Personal Affront

The House approved a Republican budget plan that could shrink Medicaid spending by \$880 billion over 10 years.

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Cynthia Williams is furious with U.S. House Republicans willing to slash Medicaid, the government-run insurance program for people with low incomes or disabilities.

The 61-year-old Anaheim resident cares for her adult daughter, who is blind, and for her sister, a military veteran with severe post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health conditions. Medi-Cal, the state's version of Medicaid, pays Williams to care for them, and she relies on that income, just as her sister and daughter depend on her.

"Let's be real. We shouldn't have to be here tonight," Williams told a raucous standing-room crowd of over 200 people at a recent town hall. "We should be home, spending time with our loved ones and our families, but we're here. And we're here to fight, because when politicians try to take away our health care, we don't have the option to sit back and let it happen."

The House last week approved a Republican budget plan that could shrink Medicaid spending by \$880 billion over 10 years, only partially paying for an extension of expiring tax cuts from President Donald Trump's first term, plus some new ones he has promised, totaling [as much as \\$4.5 trillion](#).

A spending cut of that magnitude would have a huge impact in California, with nearly 15 million people — more than a third of the population — on Medi-Cal. [Over 60%](#) of Medi-Cal's \$161 billion budget comes from Washington.

Williams was among about a dozen providers, patient advocates, disabled people, and family members who stood up one after the other to tell their stories. Rep. Young Kim, a Republican whose district includes this relatively affluent Orange County city, declined an invitation for her or a staff member to attend. But her constituents delivered their message loud and clear to her and the other Republicans in Congress: Hands off Medicaid.

Josephine Rios, a certified nursing assistant at a Kaiser Permanente surgical center in Irvine, said her 7-year-old grandson, Elijah, has received indispensable treatments through Medi-Cal, including a \$5,000-a-month medication that controls his seizures, which can be life-threatening. Elijah, who has cerebral palsy, is among the more than 50% of California children covered by Medi-Cal.

“To cut Medicaid, Medi-Cal, that’s like saying he can’t live. He can’t thrive. He’s going to lie in bed and do nothing,” Rios said. “Who are they to judge who lives and who doesn’t?”

Two thirds of Californians across party lines [oppose cuts](#) to Medi-Cal, according to a new survey by the California Health Care Foundation and [NORC at the University of Chicago](#).

The town hall here was one of three organized late last month by “Fight for Our Health,” a coalition of health advocacy groups and unions, to target Republican House members whose California districts are considered politically competitive. The other two were in Bakersfield, part of which is represented by Rep. David Valadao, and Corona, home to Rep. Ken Calvert. Multiple other town halls and protests have sprung up across the country in recent weeks.

The coalition has reprised a campaign — part of a broader national movement — that fought against the GOP’s unsuccessful 2017 effort to repeal the Affordable Care Act.

The Republicans’ loss of House control in the 2018 midterm elections has been widely attributed to their stance on health care. Valadao was among the GOP members who lost their seats in 2018, though he took his back two years later.

Still, he voted for the House budget proposal last week, despite the fact that [about two-thirds](#) of the population in his district is on Medicaid — the highest in the state — and even though he is one of eight GOP House members who [sent a letter](#) to Speaker Mike Johnson warning about the “serious consequences” of deep cuts to Medicaid. Valadao’s office did not respond to requests for comment.

Calvert, who’s been in the House [for 32 years](#) and eked out reelection last November, also voted for the budget, as did Kim. All nine GOP members of California’s congressional delegation supported it, as did all House Republicans except one.

Critics of the budget plan say it helps the rich at the expense of society’s most vulnerable — an argument that was vigorously repeated at the Tustin town hall. But supporters of the plan say that extending the tax cuts, key provisions of which are [set to expire](#) at the end of this year, would avoid a large tax hike for average Americans and benefit low-income families the most.

“American families are facing a massive tax increase unless Congress acts by the end of the year,” Calvert said in a statement to KFF Health News before the vote. He vowed the GOP would not touch Social Security or Medicare. He did not offer similar assurances on Medicaid, but said, “We are not interested in cutting the social and healthcare safety net for children, disabled, and low-income Americans. We are focused on eliminating waste, fraud, and abuse.”

The document greenlit last Tuesday does not specify spending cut details, though it instructs the Energy and Commerce Committee, which oversees Medicaid and Medicare spending, to cut \$880 billion — a large chunk of the up to \$2 trillion in total cuts. The GOP's razor-thin majority means Johnson will have a narrow path to get a more detailed budget passed. Republican support, whether from fiscal hawks who want deeper spending cuts or House members worried about slashing Medicaid, could ebb and flow as the details are hashed out.

Moreover, the House must reach a compromise with the Senate, which has passed a much narrower budget resolution that leaves the big tax cuts out for now.

Like Kim, Valadao and Calvert declined invitations to attend or send staffers to the town hall meetings in their regions. At the Tustin meeting, multiple speakers chided Kim for her absence. At one point, the large screen behind the podium flashed a picture of an empty chair with the words, in large block letters, "Congresswoman Kim, we saved you a seat."

Kim spokesperson Callie Strock said in an email that Kim and her local staff had preexisting commitments that night. She added that Kim is "committed to protecting and strengthening our health care system."

But those in attendance were clearly worried.

"It's a moral obligation for all of us to look at the most disadvantaged people in our country and take good care of them," said Beth Martinko, whose 33-year-old son, Josh, has autism and relies on Medi-Cal for his care. "This has no place in politics."

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