

Yes, House Republicans, the heartless health-care vote will define you



By **E.J. Dionne Jr.** Opinion writer May 5

We should never forget May 4, 2017.

It should forever be marked as the day when the House of Representatives descended to a new level of cruelty, irresponsibility and social meanness.

The lower chamber has always claimed to be “the people’s house.” No more. It should now come to be known by other names: the house of selfishness, the house of suffering, the house of the wealthy, the house of expediency, the house of untreated illness. Perhaps also: the house of Trump.

The Anti-Health-Care Bill passed on Thursday bids to be the most remarkable redistribution of income in congressional history, from the poor and middle class to the very wealthy. An earlier version of the legislation, according to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), would have thrown 24 million Americans off health insurance. This spiteful abomination is worse.

Republicans from Speaker Paul D. Ryan (Wis.) on down, who complained that insufficient study was given to Obamacare (despite more than a year of debate), rushed this bill through without scrutiny or a CBO score. They thought that having no numbers would make it easier for them to conceal the damage it would do to the American people — and get away with it. But their lies will be exposed.

They promised to improve Obamacare. Instead, they are bringing back the very problems that Obamacare actually fixed. One of the most popular provisions of the Affordable Care Act — supported by 87 percent of Americans in a March CNN/ORC poll — barred insurance companies from discriminating against those with preexisting conditions. This bill guts those protections.

Were you born with a heart defect? You’re out of luck. Did you have an illness in your teens that might come back? Tough. Other victims hidden in the fine print include kids in special ed programs, which could face severe cuts in Medicaid funding.

It gets worse. This bill would cut \$880 billion over a decade from Medicaid, which provides health care to about 74 million Americans — the poor, the disabled, the elderly — and another \$300 billion that now goes to helping those who cannot afford it buy health insurance. See why it's the Anti-Health-Care Bill?

Then the Republicans turn right around and plow roughly \$595 billion of this money into tax cuts, mostly for the very wealthy. And that's the real point. The initiators of this bill don't care a whit about what they do to the health-care system or how their bill will endanger the lives of many Americans, including those of a lot of their own supporters.

“Conservatism is something more than mere solicitude for tidy incomes,” Russell Kirk, one of the founding philosophers of modern conservatism, wrote in 1954. We can now say, 63 years later, that Ryan-style conservatism is *only* about solicitude for tidy incomes.

“This is who we are,” Ryan told his colleagues this week. “This will define us.”

Yes, it will. So please, Mr. Ryan, have the decency to stop giving those speeches in which you tell us about the depth of your concern about the poor and how you became interested in poverty “at a young age.” No one who would risk throwing so many poor people off health insurance with those enormous Medicaid reductions to score a political victory can claim any real interest in the welfare of the neediest Americans. Stick to tax cuts. At least you have convictions about those.

And then there is President Trump, who has absolutely no idea what's in this bill and couldn't care less. He hailed a measure that dumps people off the insurance rolls by saying that “we will have great, great health care for everyone in our nation.” And then he praised the Australian health-care system, which covers everyone and is the antithesis of the bill he had just praised.

For the benefit of this empty man, House Republicans, you just sold your social consciences.

It is said that the Senate will save House Republicans from the consequences of their craven heartlessness. No one should count on this in light of the hatred in the GOP for a law named after Barack Obama; the misguided fantasy that “the market” can cure whatever ails our health care system; the insatiable desire to keep shoveling money to the wealthiest Americans in tax relief; and the eagerness to slash and slash where programs for low-income Americans are concerned. On all these matters, pay heed to Paul Ryan: This is who they are. This defines them.

And the rest of us should never forget it.

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