

# POLITICAL DISPATCH

## FROM THE PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE



*The articles below are commentary on current events, intended to encourage further reflection and debate. Except for official Board statements, the viewpoints expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of the Woman's National Democratic Club.*

### **ACTION ALERT: Tell Congress “Say ‘No’ to Medicaid Block Grants**

The Trump Administration and Speaker Paul Ryan want to block grant Medicaid, a federal-state program begun in 1965 that funds health insurance for 75 million adults and children, most of whom have no other access to health care. Right now, everyone who qualifies for Medicaid is entitled to be covered. Almost half of Medicaid dollars (48%) funds healthcare for children from their first day of life to age 21.

If Medicaid is block granted, however, states would receive a lump (and likely reduced) sum from the federal government, and would have more control how these funds are used. Although the Administration and Speaker Ryan have not yet issued detailed proposals, block granting could significantly reduce the funding states receive and the number of people who are covered. Results could include:

- Loss of (or lower) coverage for 50% of America’s children.
- Loss of (or lower) coverage for 2/3 of frail elders in nursing homes.
- Hospitals throughout the country closing down or reducing the number of available beds.
- Job loss in communities where medical services are cut.
- Unnecessary suffering (sometimes death) for millions of Americans.

Please call your members of Congress and **tell them not to block grant Medicaid** because:

- Americans, regardless of income status, deserve access to healthcare
- Medicaid-funded healthcare is less expensive than private health insurance
- Block grants do not foster “innovation,” but can divert critical healthcare dollars to state “priorities” (such as roads or golf courses).

To contact your senators and representatives, call the congressional switchboard at 202-224-3121 or visit [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) or [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) to identify and contact your members of Congress.

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*The authors will follow up with more articles on the likely impact of Medicaid block grants. For more detailed information, visit the [Center for Budget and Policy Priorities](#).*

## Does Trump Need the Media?

By Gretchen Bloom



*“Roving Reporter” is a new series by PPC member **Gretchen Bloom**, who shares her “dispatches” from great seminars she attends around DC. More of Gretchen’s summaries are available on the WNDC website, [Local News and Events](#).*

“I have a running war with the media,” President Donald Trump declared at CIA headquarters on his first full day in office. At an unscheduled, five-minute press “briefing” that afternoon, Press Secretary Sean Spicer confounded the media with five provably false statements about the size of the crowd at his inauguration, and the next morning on NBC’s Meet the Press, Counselor to the President, Kellyanne Conway, defended those statements as “alternate facts.”

On January 30, Spicer participated in a discussion at George Washington University with an impressive panel of journalists, including Frank Sesno (Director of the GW School of Media and Public Affairs), CNN’s Jim Acosta, the former White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer, and Reuters’ Jeff Mason (President of the WH Correspondents’ Association). Spicer reflected on a week of Executive Orders rolled out with no briefings or fact sheets. While admitting his responsibility to explain the “complex” ideas and capacity of the Trump Administration to help the American people, Spicer also criticized the press for painting a negative picture of the President’s achievements during his first week in office.

When asked about the immigration ban (and why it was issued without warning), Spicer said it was essential to “protect Americans.” He was “not sure,” he said, “why seven countries” (not including Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia, for example) had been singled out, but justified the ban because “we don’t know where the next attack will come from.” The whole issue was blown out of proportion, he added, because only 109 arrests had been made from the 325,000 who had traveled into the U.S. in the first 24 hours. The disruption of thousands of lives by the ban was necessary, Spicer argued, because “our priority is to protect the USA.”

Exploring the role of the press, Spicer said the Administration was willing to have the press informed, given its healthy role in our democracy. “Why, then,” asked Sesno, “is Trump at war with the press?” And why did Presidential Adviser Steve Bannon tell the media to “keep its mouth shut” because it has “zero integrity and zero intelligence”? Spicer answered that the Trump Administration is the “most transparent in history,” having held 90-minute and 70-minute press conferences with the past several days. He added that the Administration would stop marginalizing and demonizing the press when “the press starts getting the facts right!” “The press may disagree with the President’s approach,” said Spicer, “but not with his motives.”

Sesno also grilled the journalists on the American public’s current distrust of the media, while also arguing that what really matters is the credibility of what comes from Trump. Reporters said that, while tension is normal, it is difficult to report accurately as a journalist when the facts are not clearly presented. Sesno noted heavily negative coverage of Trump and the need for more diverse voices in the press but also praised reporters’ passion and drive to provide accurate, verifiable and consistent information. Reporters, in turn, said they should not ignore Americans who do not live in coastal cities and should do their job better by reaching out to more diverse audiences.

In short, Trump does need the media and basks in its attention but needs to learn to deal with negative coverage when the press is portraying the “actual facts”...he needs to “let it go.”

## What I Learned on the Eve of the Women's March on Washington

Washington DC's beloved independent bookstore, Politics and Prose (P&P) , became a feminist haven beginning November 8, 2016, as the store launched its "teach-ins" on women's issues, leading up to the January 21 Women's March on Washington.

Speakers included Rebecca Traister (author of *Big Girls Don't Cry*, and *All the Single Ladies*), Fatima Cosgrave of the National Women's Law Center, and Jennifer Klein, attorney, specialist in Global Women for Hillary and law professor at Georgetown University.

Takeaway messages included a warning that feminism splintered with the "cacophony of 11/8/2016," when 53 percent of all women voted for Trump. Misinformation and "divide and conquer" tactics by Republicans succeeded in peeling off votes that might otherwise have gone to Hillary Clinton, speakers said. They also noted that the coalition of women and Black Lives Matter is terrifying to white men and that Trump is the last gasp of white male supremacy.

Speakers stressed that progressives have two challenges:

- Repairing/preventing the immediate loss of our social safety nets for ourselves and our planet and our progress in attaining equality and diversity
- Rebuilding our democracy at all levels through engagement, including running for office

All progressives must "show up" everywhere **and make constant noise—at town halls, government offices, county fairs, and school board meetings**. We need to welcome robust disagreement in devising our platforms and our tactics. We should be inclusive of all "groups". And we must realize that only coalitions can succeed. We must also open our wallets and pay for our newspapers and our online news sources, and support progressive advocacy (e.g., the ACLU, NAACP), and support local progressive candidates.

And when someone says "What do you women really want?" we should tell them that women's rights are not simply reproductive rights.

Women's rights include:

- Public education for all
- Environmental protection and stewardship of the planet
- Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, and universal health care
- Voting rights and election reform
- Fair pay and fewer wealth disparities
- Fair immigration policies
- Native American rights
- Black Lives Matter
- Sensible gun policies

In Hillary Clinton's famous words, "human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights. And now, as Michelle Obama would say, "let's move!"

*Karen Pataky*

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## **“Repeal, Replace, and Repair”: What Worked and What Didn’t in Obamacare Insurance Markets**

As the Trump Administration and Congress discuss ‘repealing and replacing’ the Affordable Care Act (ACA, or “Obamacare”), it’s important to understand how the ACA actually has worked. In particular, the ACA has fundamentally changed health care insurance markets, increasing coverage across all demographic groups, altering regulations for the individual health insurance market, and creating state-level electronic marketplaces in which consumers can choose among plans. The goal of these reforms was to increase access to insurance coverage while lowering costs.

The Brookings and Rockefeller Institutes undertook a five-state study (CA, FL, MI, NC, and TX) to better understand competition in the ACA marketplace. The study had two objectives: 1) to generate hypotheses about the development and evolution of the exchanges; and 2) to describe the idiosyncratic nature of the marketplace in each of the five states, with different political and economic circumstances.

The results of this study, as summarized by a renowned panel of experts at the Brookings Institution on February 9, were categorized according to four broad themes:

- Health insurance markets are local. They depend on the ability of insurers to create competitively priced plans, easier in urban areas but there is still variation in competition there.
- Higher-than-expected claims costs have been the source of much of the turmoil in the health insurance marketplaces especially because insurers lacked information on the amount of health care utilization to expect from enrollees.
- There has been a substantial shift toward narrower insurer networks of providers. As a result, insurers can negotiate lower prices by assuring a greater volume of patients to a more limited number of providers.
- Hospital and provider competition are both essential to a robust and competitive insurer market.

Their key findings included the following:

- Health care markets take time to develop.
- Competitive markets work the best.
- Navigators (guides specially trained to help consumers make health insurance decisions) are essential to help grow an insurance market because they can do outreach and help establish alliance. They thrive on competition and are not worried by it.
- An insurance market can only thrive if it has healthy clients as well as less healthy ones. To maintain this pool of subscribers, there need to be incentives. Risk pools do not work.
- The markets will fail if subscribers opt in and out, keeping coverage during a risky period and opting out when healthy.

“Repealing and Replacing” the highly complex Affordable Health Care Act will not be easy. Understanding how it works, though, is the first step in responding to whatever steps Congress takes this year.

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