

SOCIAL JUSTICE

WHY MEDICAID IS WORTH DYING FOR

Disability rights protestors staged a die-in outside Mitch McConnell's office to protest the gutting of Medicaid.

DAVID M. PERRY · JUN 22, 2017

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Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell talks to reporters at the U.S. Capitol on June 20th, 2017.

This morning, ADAPT, America's leading direct-action disability rights group, seized the hallway and staged a die-in outside the office of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. There was literally blood on the floor. The images of disabled men and women being dragged from in front of McConnell's office took over the Internet, just hours after the GOP revealed its health-care bill. One man's voice echoed as four or five officers lifted him out of the building, "No cuts to Medicaid!" An NBC News video went viral, joined by video on other networks and clips captured by various high-profile journalists.

For an hour or two, disability rights finally took center stage in the debate about the Trumpcare legislation.



For the past six months, Pacific Standard has been covering the emergence and intensification of disability rights activism, and the concerns of that community under President Donald Trump's administration. From the beginning, there was concern that the GOP would roll back access to health care, but as the anti-Obamacare bills emerged, the situation looked worse than anyone had expected.

Along the way, ADAPT has been working around the nation, joined by other disability rights groups, to make sure the health-care conversation includes disability supports and services (not just access to doctors). We've followed them to Kenosha, Wisconsin, where they protested outside Speaker Paul Ryan's office. We've looked at how diverse elements—including ADAPT but also the American Civil Liberties Union, the Center for American Progress, Access Living, and many other groups—are coordinating efforts to fight the GOP health-care bills.



Mike Oxford, a member of Kansas ADAPT, flew in last night for the protest and was arrested this morning. He tells me he had been transported "by accessible paddywagon—equality cuts all ways!"—then held in downtown Washington, D.C., "where the lock-up is," and is now doing fine. Because he was at the front of the protest, he got into McConnell's office, where the die-in was staged by those people who could physically put themselves on the floor. "We did send a strong message," Oxford says. "What McConnell is doing in a very sneaky, underhanded way totally threatens our liberty, our lives, in almost every state. The largest optional Medicaid budget items are home- and community-based services that allow us to live freely with our family, friends, work, play, and just ... live free on the Earth!"

There's more protest to come, as needed. The action at McConnell's office, as Oxford puts it, "was classic, non-violent, civil disobedience. It's as American as apple pie. Every single right that anyone has won in this country has been because of protest." But the national media has been slow to start talking about more than access to doctors and medicines; reporters seem reluctant to start focusing on the basic freedoms of people with disabilities. Today, with multiple witnesses telling me that one of the national organizers, Bruce Darling, bled on the floor as he was being roughly dragged away—and with a dozen more ADAPTERS in custody—that might finally start to change.

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wheeler58 · 8 days ago The Republican health care bill, if passed, could cause the institutionalization of many persons with disabilities who are now living in the community. We disabled people have probably the highest stake in this entire thing than any other minority group, or people anywhere. The Republican health care bill, threatens our independence and ability to live within the community. It is a threat to our very existence and we are willing to die fighting for our independence and freedom. The alternative is a form of "slow genocide" that we refuse to accept.

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