

Bill Kaplan: Ryan and Trump, drop dead rural-urban folks

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The Ryan-Trump health plan and federal budget have a clear message: drop dead rural and urban Wisconsinites. Their health plan uses repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) to push through tax cuts for the top 2.5 percent of taxpayers (Washington Post), while increasing the uninsured by 24 million (Congressional Budget Office). “The biggest losses in tax credits (to pay for private insurance) in Wisconsin would occur in two mostly rural congressional districts, the northern seat held by (GOP Rep.) Sean Duffy and the western seat held by (Democratic Rep.) Ron Kind” (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel). Duffy supports repeal of ACA, while Kind is opposed. It gets worse.

On Thursday, Trump released a budget plan to Congress. House Speaker Paul Ryan said: “I welcome the president’s blueprint for next year’s budget” The budget calls for a huge increase in military spending, with no tax earmarked to pay for it. Also absent is any reference to the vaunted Trump infrastructure plan (bridges, mass transit, roads and water systems). Just cut after cut of the 15 percent of the federal budget for domestic spending. The budget is a con job. Why?

“The United States already spends more on the military than the next seven countries combined, and maintains the most advanced fighting force in the world” (New York Times). The military buildup (to what end?) will be paid for on the backs of regular folks. America would be unrecognizable as it descends into a misery not seen since the 1930s.

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“The rural voters who turned out in droves to elect President Donald Trump would be some of the biggest losers under the new White House budget. ... Trump would slash programs that invest in rural infrastructure, target rural public radio and demolish food-aid programs that farmers rely on to buy their products. ... The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which helps seniors and other low-income Americans with their heating bills, would be eliminated ...” (Politico). Over 200,000 households in Wisconsin receive financial help from LIHEAP, averaging \$336 per household (Campaign for Home Energy Assistance). There’s more.

Madison and Milwaukee would also suffer greatly. Madison Mayor Soglin said: “To welcome it as a blueprint for the future is not only nonsensical but extremely dangerous to the future of the country and our nation’s security”. Milwaukee Mayor Barrett was blunt: “It’s a direct frontal attack on programs that are critical not only to cities but to states, and most importantly to people who rely on the federal government to be there to help them at a time of need”. Both cities face draconian cuts with Trump’s call for the elimination of Community Development Block Grants (housing, community development and homeless programs) as well as funding for roads and mass transit.

The Trump budget is a calculated attack on rural and urban Wisconsinites, providing more influence for the well-heeled and avoiding any attempt to address our fiscal problems without more misery for regular folks.

— Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C. for the *Wisconsin State Journal* from 1995 - 2009.