



5 Ways President Trump and Congressional Republicans Are Betraying Veterans

By Katherine Gallagher Robbins, Rejane Frederick, Angela Hanks, Rachel West, and Michela Zonta September 26, 2017

Despite vowing to support America's veterans, President Donald Trump and congressional Republican leaders have put forth budget proposals that are poised to do great damage to the economic security of veterans and their families—all to pay for tax cuts for millionaires and corporations.¹ In fact, new analysis by the Center for American Progress reveals that the tax cuts Trump wants to give corporations and businesses, which will cost \$4.3 trillion over 10 years, amount to 28 times as much as the deep cuts he is proposing to services and benefits for veterans.²

And these cuts are just the tip of the iceberg.

Despite the common belief to the contrary, veteran-specific benefits and services fall short of meeting the needs of veterans and their families, many of whom struggle to meet basic needs even with Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) supports.³ More than 3.9 million veterans live paycheck to paycheck—meaning their family incomes are less than twice the federal poverty level, or less than \$50,000 for a family of four.⁴ Yet new CAP analysis reveals that if Trump's proposed cuts to key job training programs were applied directly to program participation, more than 340,000 veterans could lose access to critical employment services that help boost wages.

Additionally, CAP estimates that over the next decade, 400,000 veterans on average could lose access to critical nutrition assistance each year if the cut proposed in President Trump's budget were applied directly to participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). If instead the cuts proposed in the House of Representatives Republican budget were applied, more than 554,000 veterans could lose SNAP each year between 2023 and 2027. Previous congressional Republican attempts to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act (ACA) would have cost close to half a million veterans their Medicaid benefits by 2026.⁵ And the most recent repeal effort, which makes devastating changes to Medicaid,⁶ would be even worse, costing an estimated 579,000 veterans their Medicaid coverage within a decade.⁷

This analysis largely focuses on President Trump's budget since the budget put forth by congressional leaders includes fewer details, making it impossible to know in many instances exactly how it would harm veterans. But the overall size of the spending cuts that congressional leaders are proposing—coupled with their massive proposed tax cuts—would make it virtually impossible for veterans and their families to escape unscathed.

Here are the five ways in which Trump's and the congressional majority's budgets deceptively undermine the security of veterans and their families, whether it is their ability to find work, stay healthy, or keep a roof over their heads.

1. Making it harder for veterans to find jobs

President Trump began his attack on veterans' jobs when he first took office by instituting a hiring freeze for the federal government. This freeze disproportionately affected veterans, who are an essential part of the federal workforce. Nearly one-third of federal employees hired in 2015 were veterans, and close to half of these were veterans with disabilities.⁸

Now, despite promising to invest more⁹ in training opportunities for veterans, the Trump budget would make it more difficult for veterans to access essential job training and employment services. The public workforce system, authorized by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), serves nearly 1 million veterans each year, offering services such as career development, job training, and job search assistance.¹⁰ Yet the Trump administration's proposed budget cuts would result in thousands of veterans losing access to these programs and services.

In 2015, for example, the WIOA adult, dislocated worker, and youth programs served more than 80,000 veterans.¹¹ The Trump budget would cut funding for these services by 43 percent from 2015 levels, meaning that more than 34,000 veterans could lose access to essential services.¹² The Trump budget would also cut the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service by 36 percent from 2015 levels.¹³ This service provides labor-exchange services to jobseekers, including 858,000 veterans. As a result, nearly 309,000 veterans could lose access to Wagner-Peyser services.¹⁴ These cuts overshadow any slight investments the administration has proposed for training and employment programs that specifically target veterans, such as the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program.¹⁵

2. Reducing veterans' access to health care

Contrary to popular belief, not all veterans are eligible for, enrolled in, or even fully covered by the VA's health care system.¹⁶ In actuality, most veterans and their families depend on private health insurance,¹⁷ which covers 13.6 million veterans,¹⁸ or public insurance such as Medicaid, to which nearly 1.8 million veterans turn for coverage.¹⁹

According to a recent report by the Urban Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, under the ACA, the number of uninsured veterans decreased nearly 40 percent between 2013 and 2015 thanks largely to the ACA's expansion of Medicaid coverage.²⁰ These vital health coverage gains for extremely vulnerable veterans and their families will be wiped out should Congress' latest ACA repeal efforts become law.²¹ Under previous congressional repeal proposals, nearly half a million veterans would have lost Medicaid benefits by 2026.²² The latest ACA repeal effort—referred to as the Graham-Cassidy bill after its two lead sponsors—is even more radical: It stops funding for the ACA's Medicaid expansion after 2026 and caps the remaining Medicaid program. This proposal is estimated to cost 579,000 veterans their Medicaid coverage by 2027.²³

And it is not solely veterans covered by Medicaid who are at risk. The essential health benefits (EHBs) that many veterans and their families depend on to support their needs resulting from service-connected disabilities, to recover from illness, and to stay healthy remain under threat.²⁴ Graham-Cassidy would allow states to waive the EHB requirements, as well as undermine the ACA's protections for people with pre-existing conditions. Because of these changes, some veterans and their families could face sky-high premium increases. The potential toll of these destructive actions spearheaded by the Trump administration not only reveals Trump's deceitful betrayal of veterans but also eviscerates his claim that he is improving veterans' access to timely, quality care.²⁵

3. Taking away supports and services from veterans with disabilities

President Trump's proposed \$72 billion in deep cuts to the nation's disability supports over the next decade would also be disastrous for veterans.²⁶ Nearly 1 million veterans received Social Security Disability Insurance benefits in 2013,²⁷ but President Trump wants to add more red tape that would make it harder for people with disabilities to access the benefits they have earned.²⁸ Cuts to Social Security would be on top of President Trump's budget proposal to eliminate the Individual Unemployability benefits program, which permits the VA to provide benefits at the 100 percent-disabled rate to veterans who are unable to get a job because of service-connected disabilities, even if their disability is not rated at the 100 percent level.²⁹

This proposed elimination—which was put on hold in response to fierce opposition from veterans groups—would cut disability benefits for older veterans, including more than 225,000 veterans currently receiving benefits.³⁰ Additionally, President Trump has proposed eliminating the Limb Loss Resource Center and the Paralysis Resource Center,³¹ both of which provide essential support for veterans, who are disproportionately likely to be paralyzed and have elevated rates of traumatic amputation.³²

4. Increasing veteran hunger and food insecurity

Veterans and their families make up a sizeable share of Americans facing food insecurity.³³ In a recent long-term study of veterans, nearly 1 in 4 participants experienced food insecurity and were more likely to have difficulty staying healthy as a result. Inadequate nutrition can also exacerbate chronic health conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and depression.³⁴ New CAP analysis reveals that in 2015, nearly 1.5 million veterans lived in households that relied on SNAP benefits to keep themselves and their families healthy and fed. If implemented through a reduction in the number of people participating in the program, the cut of nearly \$200 billion that Trump proposed for SNAP over the next decade could snatch critical nutrition assistance away from an average of 400,000 veterans per year—needlessly exposing them to the threats of hunger and malnourishment.³⁵

The House budget delivers an almost equally devastating blow to SNAP, cutting \$154 billion over 10 years.³⁶ But since the House majority budget concentrates its cuts in the final years of the budget window—slashing projected SNAP spending by 42 percent between 2023 and 2027—its plan could result in an even greater number of veterans losing access in those years: All told, more than 554,000 veterans could lose SNAP coverage each year between 2023 and 2027.³⁷

5. Increasing veteran homelessness and housing insecurity

Nearly two-thirds of the people reported as homeless or living in shelters in the 2016 single-night census conducted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) were veterans.³⁸ Rental assistance is critical in helping veterans afford decent housing and in preventing and reducing veteran homelessness. More than 340,000 low-income veterans received rental assistance, which plays a significant role in reducing veterans' homelessness, in March 2014.³⁹ Some veterans receive rental assistance through the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) voucher program, which combines rental assistance for homeless veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the VA.⁴⁰ Since 2008, this program has provided 85,000 veterans and their families with housing assistance.⁴¹ Mayors across the nation—in coordination with federal agencies and local nonprofits, community-based organizations, and public housing authorities—have made significant progress toward the goal of ending homelessness among veterans and their families.⁴² Veteran homelessness declined an estimated 47 percent between 2010 and 2016.⁴³

Yet current affordable housing and homelessness prevention initiatives provide support for only a small share of veterans.⁴⁴ President Trump's agenda threatens to make veterans' housing insecurity even worse by targeting rental assistance programs for cuts.⁴⁵ His proposed budget cuts to the Housing Choice Voucher program would likely reduce the ability to afford housing and avoid homelessness among veterans who do not receive assistance through the HUD-VASH program.⁴⁶ Trump's proposed cuts to other programs—such as the Section 811 Supportive Housing for Persons with Disabilities

program, the Public Housing Capital Fund, the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, and the National Housing Trust Fund—could have outsized consequences for veterans as well.⁴⁷ Although these programs are not designed solely to target veterans’ housing needs, they do provide low-income veterans with critical resources.

The 2016 American Community Survey indicates that more than 5.3 million veterans have disabilities. Of these, more than half a million live below the federal poverty line.⁴⁸ Low-income veterans with disabilities are among those eligible for housing assistance through the Section 811 program, which supports the expansion of affordable, accessible housing for people with disabilities. The Section 811 program, however, would be downsized under Trump’s budget proposal.⁴⁹ The proposed budget would also affect veterans who reside in public housing units in need of major repairs. The proposed cuts to the Public Housing Capital Fund—the main source of federal funding for the preservation of public housing—could mean that many struggling veterans residing in distressed public housing units would continue to live in unsafe dwellings.⁵⁰ Further, by slashing funding for the CDBG program and the National Housing Trust Fund, the proposed budget would significantly curtail local anti-homelessness efforts to develop and provide affordable housing and supportive services for veterans.⁵¹

The Trump agenda also calls for the elimination of the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), which provides low-income individuals with civil legal aid to reconnect them with vital benefits and services that, among many things, can help them stay in their homes, fight discriminatory business practices, and escape abusive environments.⁵² More than 1.7 million veterans are income-eligible for LSC services.⁵³ Last year alone, LSC-funded organizations worked on roughly 41,000 civil legal cases involving households that included veterans struggling to make ends meet.⁵⁴ The civil legal problems that many of these vulnerable veterans face often relate to their discharge status, barriers to care for service-related health issues, and denied service benefits.⁵⁵

Conclusion

Both veterans and their families have made sacrifices for this country. The United States should commit to meeting their collective needs and ensuring familial care after service members leave active duty. Cutting services that directly affect veterans would be a double betrayal, as both veterans and their families would suffer if programs that support their basic living needs were slashed.

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