

Trump White House preparing sweeping attack on the poor

Patrick Martin
12 December 2017

The Trump administration is preparing a frontal assault on social programs for the poorest Americans, according to a report published Monday by the *Politico* web site. This would involve “the most sweeping changes to federal safety net programs in a generation, using legislation and executive actions to target recipients of food stamps, Medicaid and housing benefits,” the web site said.

“The White House is quietly preparing a sweeping executive order that would mandate a top-to-bottom review of the federal programs on which millions of poor Americans rely,” *Politico* reported. “And GOP lawmakers are in the early stages of crafting legislation that could make it more difficult to qualify for those programs.”

The executive order could be issued as soon as next month. It amounts to a political conspiracy against the poorest sections of the working class involving the White House, the congressional leadership and dozens of state governments, working together to slash spending on programs for the poor through a combination of direct benefit cuts, tightened eligibility standards and mistreatment of vulnerable families to drive as many as possible out of programs on which they now depend.

The Department of Agriculture said last week it would give states greater power to limit eligibility for food stamps, which it administers, by imposing drug testing or tighter work requirements, even though the vast majority of families receiving food stamp benefits have at least one working adult.

Congressional Republican leaders indicated that the attack on domestic social spending would not be limited to means-tested programs such as food stamps and Medicaid, which are available only to low-income families. The broadest entitlement programs, which

provide services to all families, regardless of income, will also be targeted.

House Speaker Paul Ryan told a radio interview last week, “We’re going to have to get back next year to entitlement programs.” He singled out health care, pledging not only to repeal Obamacare, an effort that failed earlier this year in the Senate, but to privatize Medicare, which he denounced as “government-run health care.”

Voicing the claim endlessly repeated by Republicans that it hurts poor families to provide them access to adequate medical care or put food on the table for their children, Ryan declared, “We have a welfare system that’s basically trapping people in poverty and effectively paying people not to work.”

Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue sounded the same theme, calling for further cutbacks in the food stamp program, officially titled the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. “SNAP was created to provide people with the help they need to feed themselves and their families, but it was not intended to be a permanent lifestyle,” Perdue said.

The measures being prepared by the Trump administration and congressional Republicans, behind the backs of the American people, would effectively make the poorest sections of the working class pay for the massive tax cut for the wealthy that is now in the final stages of congressional passage.

Both the House and Senate have named members to participate in a special conference that will combine the different versions of a \$1.5 trillion tax cut for the rich that passed the House in November and the Senate last week. All indications are that far from representing a “compromise,” the conference will choose the most reactionary measures from the House and Senate versions to produce a final bill that is substantially

worse than either of the separate bills.

Last Thursday, 54 House Republicans sent a letter to the House Republican leadership demanding that they stand firm on the House plan for a full repeal of the estate tax—paid by only 5,500 super-wealthy families—rather than accept the Senate plan, which retains the tax but raises the minimum size of the estate to which it would apply from \$22 million to \$44 million.

Similarly, Senate Republicans are demanding that the conference committee accept the Senate version's elimination of the Obamacare tax penalty for those who do not buy health insurance, an action that would destabilize the individual insurance market and leave another 13 million people without health coverage.

The essence of the bill, certain to be retained in whatever version is ultimately adopted, is the lowering of taxes on the earnings of capitalists and the raising of taxes on the earnings of workers. It is class legislation of the most flagrant and reactionary kind. As an analysis of the bill in the *New York Times* explained, “for the first time since the United States adopted an income tax, a higher rate would be applied to employee wages and salaries than to income earned by proprietors, partnerships and closely held corporations.”

Under these conditions, the Democratic Party has chosen to focus not on the historic nature of the attack on working people, but on a series of political scandals, first involving claims of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, and now involving a hunt for alleged sexual predators in the entertainment industry, the media and politics, which the Democrats hope will undermine Trump.

Four Democratic senators, including Bernie Sanders, who challenged Hillary Clinton for the presidential nomination in 2016, and Kirsten Gillibrand, who is spearheading the sexual misconduct purge, have called for Trump to resign the presidency because of allegations of sexual misconduct by more than a dozen women, involving incidents spread out over three decades.

It is remarkable that the Democrats do not demand that Trump resign because of the crimes his administration has committed against millions of working people—attacking social programs, slashing enforcement of safety and environmental regulations,

rounding up immigrants and revoking DACA protection for nearly 1 million immigrants brought here as children—let alone Trump's threatening the world with nuclear war in North Korea.

Their focus is entirely on Trump's personal conduct before he entered the White House, not on the policies being pursued by his administration. That is because the Democrats largely support these policies and would do so openly and enthusiastically if the same measures were being carried out by a President Hillary Clinton.

Similarly, the Democratic campaign in the Senate race in Alabama, where voters go to the polls today, is focused entirely on allegations of sexual misconduct against the Republican candidate Roy Moore, dating back as much as 40 years, while the Democrats are silent on the appalling social conditions created by decades of Republican rule in the southern state.

According to a United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty, who visited the state last week, Alabama has the worst poverty of any area in the developed world, including the prevalence of diseases like hookworm, normally found only in the poorest areas of sub-Saharan Africa. The UN official, Philip Alston, toured a rural community where “raw sewage flows from homes through exposed PVC pipes and into open trenches and pits,” he told an interviewer.

The United States has 41 million people living below the official poverty line and the second-highest poverty rate in the developed world—below only the state of Israel, with its large super-oppressed Palestinian population.

These issues are of no concern to the Democratic Party, which shares responsibility for the devastating conditions facing the working class, made significantly worse by eight years of right-wing policies under the Obama administration.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact