

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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Happy Birthday America! Imagine What's Possible

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For many the 4th of July represents what can be possible. It is a time of family and community togetherness. It is a time to forget old wounds, hurts and pains and remember the good and fun times and reflect on those things that are most important to us. As a child, I remember how my dad used to buy me and my three brothers sparklers. We would watch our individual sparkler emit colored flames and sparks and we would pretend to have a race to see whose sparkler would burn out first. In looking back on those days, it seemed like that on the 4th of July there was an extra special dose of caring, consideration and loving for one another. This outpouring of love is natural and unforced. Unfortunately, in the midst of our 4th of July celebrations and nostalgic memories, there are discussions and debates taking place that will extinguish the sparklers and dampen the celebration. The current debates about major cuts to Medicaid do not seem to exhibit caring, compassionate or loving actions but will in fact have harmful effects on millions of adults and children.

Medicaid, the nation's public health insurance program for low-income people, now covers nearly 60 million Americans including children and parents in working families, pregnant women, seniors, and individuals with disabilities. Medicaid is the largest source of financing for nursing home and community-based

long-term care, and it provides essential funding for the safety-net delivery system on which many Americans rely. Most Medicaid enrollees would be uninsured without the program.

Opponents to Medicaid have called for some of the largest cuts in the history of the program. If these cuts are approved they would add up to about 750 billion over ten years. In addition to harming the lives of many Americans, these cuts would also have a significant and harmful effect on state economies and jobs, as federal funding to states stimulates business activity and creates jobs.

In April a Kaiser Health Tracking Poll indicated that 85% of Americans either oppose reductions or support only minor reductions to Medicaid. The voices of the faith community are needed more than ever to protect Medicaid. We must raise our voices in support of the persons these programs serve. Our President, Representatives, and Senators need to hear that we oppose efforts to address our nation's fiscal problems that are on the backs of low-income and working families, children, persons with disabilities, and low-income seniors. Our elected leaders need to hear this from us now!

As we remember the fun and the joys of celebrating our country's recent birthday we might want to imagine what can be possible as we continue to address the proposed injustices against vulnerable Americans. We can only fight the good fight and leave the victory to God's grace. We are God's hands and hearts on earth. It's only when we have the courage to do justice, practice compassion, humility, love and kindness, will we be able to embrace the vision of Martin Luther King's beloved community and truly say "Happy Birthday" America!

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