



Does Trump mean the end of Medicare for All?

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America's healthcare system is broken and people are dying.

Welcome to Code WACK!, where we shine a light on America's callous healthcare system, how it hurts us and what we can do about it. I'm your host Brenda Gazzar.

(music)

This time on **Code WACK!** What is organized labor doing in the aftermath of a Trump victory to protect the most vulnerable? And what does another Trump administration mean for healthcare reform in California and the nation? To find out, we recently interviewed **Ada Briceño**, chair of **Orange County Democrats** and co-chair of **Unite Here Local 11**, which represents tens of thousands of workers in hotels, restaurants, airports, and sports arenas in Southern California and Arizona. This is the second episode in a two-part series.

Q: Welcome back to Code WACK! Ada. Let's talk about immigrant healthcare in California. The state has extended Medicaid coverage to all eligible undocumented immigrants, which was a big move for California. And it was the

first state to do that in the country. Are you concerned that healthcare could be denied somehow to undocumented immigrants under Trump?

Briceño: Yeah, I mean, I hope that here in California we're able to fortify that and figure out just like we enshrined you know abortion rights in our constitution, like what are the next steps for Democrats to take in California so we can enshrine that, you know, for immigrants, of course, that that's a big worry. His deportation plans to hear all that to begin with. I think that's a way of, you know, for him to reduce cost, you know, to health care as well, right? That's kind of a byproduct of that. It's definitely frightening and I don't know what the mechanism would be to help protect that despite what Trump does nationwide. But I'm hoping that folks are already looking at that.

Q: And in the aftermath of this election, what do you see as the role of both of your organizations, OC Democrats and Unite Here Local 11, in the next four years with a Trump administration?

Briceño: To resist, especially here in California. I mean I'm grateful to be here, even though we have, we're gonna feel many of the things that we feel, but we have like-minded organizations and groups that feel very similar to us, right? And just like, you know, holding tight to resist these things that are gonna happen and start working towards making sure 2026 that we can start taking some of those powers away from the Congress and the Senate. It's gonna be hard, but you know what? I believe we have been successful before, and we also have lost and had him around for four years, and we saw what could happen. But we also know that the beautiful thing in our country is that when we organize and we stand for our values we can fight back.

Q: Got it. So there have been multiple congressional bills over the years trying to implement a single-payer healthcare system in America that would give everyone comprehensive healthcare regardless of their age, job, or marital status. What do you think a Trump victory means for [Sen.] Bernie Sanders and [Rep.] Pramila Jayapal and National Medicare for all, all bills? Are they essentially moot at this point?

Briceño: I mean I feel that we still need to keep pushing because that puts pressure on keeping what we have. Do you know what I'm saying? It's like we can't stop, we've gotta continue to talk about Medicare for All. We have to continue to push back around this narrative of gutting the ACA, you know? And I think those dialogues happen right next to each other. We got to continue to have that conversation and have expectations for the American people. We just have to,

right? I don't know how the conversation just stops because, because he's there. I think it's difficult, but the strategy, in my opinion, is not to stop.

Q: Right? I agree. And the longer that we wait, the more people are dying and not getting the health care they need and going medically bankrupt. And we have to keep those issues in the spotlight.

Briceño: And meanwhile, and I'm not an expert, but I know that more people are getting cancer, even though luckily, you know, less people are dying from it. Right. But more people are getting cancer and having to deal with treatment and feeling their lifestyles be worsened. Right? And we need it. We need it. We need to keep pushing and we need Bernie Sanders, and we need [Pramila] Jayapal, and we need all voices to rise. Just like the same thing with immigration reform. Do we stop talking about it because he's there? Absolutely not. This is when we speak louder. This is when we push harder, you know? And I'm ready for both conversations. Frankly. I'm ready to help be part of the voices loud or not, you know, I'm ready to have those conversations. Those are two of the issues that are most important to me in social justice.

Q: Yes. And both our immigration system and our healthcare system are broken and need major reform – and they've been that way for decades. So what do you think this means the Trump victory means for single payer efforts in California? Do you think it halts or pauses the progress made towards state negotiations with the federal government on waivers and funding, for example?

Briceño: I haven't thought about it enough to say, but I would keep on pushing forward. I mean, I suspect we're going to have a strong team pushing that forward as much as we can. I mean, we can't give up.

Right. Especially since Governor Newsom signed Senate Bill 770, which authorizes the state to negotiate a waiver with the federal government to help fund a unified healthcare system for all Californians.

Briceño: Right. And I've been with 770 and I was with... I think everybody's work has to come together and we have to try so many things in order for, 'cause it hasn't been done. So we can't not try and push forth any efforts for Medicare for All. For me, ... as imperfect as they may be, even though we may have some split or division, I'm ready to push an issue around Medicare for All, anytime, all the time.

Right and sometimes an external threat can help people to unite. Maybe that will happen with the single-payer movement.

Briceño: I love that. I think we have to look at that as an opportunity. Yeah. I mean, when we see something challenged, when we see something, when we're afraid of something. It also brings, you know, fear has a way of bringing so many emotions from us. And one of them is courage, you know? Yeah. And maybe we'll find, you know, we will have others come and join in to make some real reform.

Q: Yeah. Do you want to add anything about where the single-payer movement in America and California should go from here? And what should the movement focus on right now?

Briceño: I mean, I think we should continue having the conversations with folks and bringing people together. I love how a single-payer movement wants to continue having these discussions with labor. You know, I don't think we should deviate from bringing labor into the discussion, from asking the questions from labor as to what it needs in order to come in, you know, having the frank difficult discussions with them. I think that work needs to continue. I forged those alliances, especially. You're right. Especially now.

Q: And what percentage of union members in California do you think support single-payer Medicare for all today?

Briceño: Just a guess? Maybe 30 to 40%. And I could be maybe very hopeful. <Laugh> Maybe. It's a very hopeful number.

Labor has fought really hard for our health care. We have it in our collective bargaining agreements. We fought for it. We let go of wages for it. We let go of other benefits to have it. And we have good health care. That's the one thing that we do have, right. Like, that distinguishes us. And so there's an immense pride from it. And not to know I think from the perspective of my brothers and sisters, not to know or have control of that is a bit scary. Right. And then I mean, that's one of the things that I think, you know. Also, as labor leaders, we're very, very very ingrained in the whole process as trustees. So we sit, we sit as trustees in an employee employer managed fund. And so many of the union leaders really look at the details and the numbers and the changes and the benefits, and how to enhance those benefits. So we're able to control a lot of it, obviously, if we have the resources. right. So I think losing that control is a little bit hard for folks amongst maybe other things.

Q: And yet, you have been very active in support of Medicare for All.

Briceño: I also think that the people that advise us, the consultants, it's not in their benefit to get rid of the trust funds and have Medicare for All, because all their jobs go away. So you're not gonna wanna have, as a consultant, your job. And so I think there's also some of that or a lot of that.

Q: Why is it such an important issue for you personally?

Briceño: Because it's a human right to have health care and I know that our members will be better when everybody is good. So if we have this odd system where some people deserve through their work, health care and others don't, because it's a choice of the boss, you know, we need to take it away from having it as a bargaining issue, in my opinion. We need to be able to bargain over more wages, over pension benefits, over all these other benefits. And also, the boss uses it as a tool to keep our members scared because they always say, oh, you, you know, if you unionize, we get rid of your health care. If we used all the time and effort to focus on other benefits, and we didn't have to worry about healthcare because we had Medicare for All, then we can ask for childcare. We can organize more people into the union. We wouldn't have people so fearful. I mean, I know people who are excellent cooks in their place. They can open up a restaurant, but they'll never leave their hotel, you know, where they cook their kitchen because they don't want to let go of their health care. So again, it stops people from following their dreams, you know? It ties the person up for a career change, on and on, on and on.

Right. And maybe they don't fully realize that if there was a single-payer Medicare for All system, then that would be much more comprehensive than what they have today.

Briceño: Yes.

Thank you Ada Briceño.

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