

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM on your dial in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant with news and commentary for Tuesday, May 27, 2025.

Jefferson Healthcare officials are concerned about the implications of President Donald Trump's Big Beautiful Budget Bill, which in its current form threatens the Medicaid funding that the hospital needs to keep its doors open. In a written statement to KPTZ, hospital CEO Mike Glenn said that cuts to Medicaid currently being debated at the Federal level are unprecedented and potentially catastrophic for us as a small rural hospital. "I have been a hospital administrator on the North Olympic Peninsula for 30 years," Glenn wrote, "and this is the most challenging fiscal environment rural hospitals have faced."

The bill passed the House of Representatives by a single vote. It is headed to the Senate for revision, after which time a reconciliation process will occur. Washington State's two Democratic Senators, Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, will vote against any Medicaid cuts. Letters to Senators in red states from Washington voters will be ignored, as congresspeople generally do not consider correspondence from outside their own constituency.

Jefferson Healthcare Commissioner Kees Kolff said there are effective ways to make yourself heard on this topic before the Senate votes. He said that Cantwell and Murray welcome data and stories in support of Medicaid to help build their arguments. And locals can contact friends and relatives living in red states to supply personal stories about Medicaid's importance to their own representatives. Kolff, speaking for himself rather than the board, said that the hospital will serve patients, regardless of their Medicaid status. This would increase the financial burden on the Hospital District, which is still recovering from recent losses related to the pandemic.

Glenn said the proposed cuts would disproportionately impact older, poorer communities like ours, where 80% of patients are covered by public programs like Medicare and Medicaid. The cuts on the table are so deep that their impact to services will affect all patients. Scheduling and wait times will likely increase for many services, while others face being cut altogether. With increased barriers, people will stop seeking necessary health care which will result in a busier and fuller emergency room and worse healthcare outcomes for many.

Glenn predicted that a ripple effect will be felt through Jefferson and Clallam Counties and will impact service and operations here at Jefferson Healthcare. We, as a community, stand to lose big if the cuts go through, he wrote.

Questions remain one week after the announcement that the parking lot outside of Don's Pharmacy and Quimper Mercantile is converting to a paid system, with severe negative local reaction. Tourists, in the meantime, seem unaffected by the system, with many connecting to the app and paying the fee. These tourists feel free to shop in other parts of town. The biggest question has to do with enforcement: what will happen to those who park without paying. Retail sources say enforcement will be accomplished through the use of cameras, which are not currently in apparent view. Right now it appears to be unenforced, with locals ignoring the signs in protest and tourists paying the fee. Such systems are in place in many other towns, and visitors don't expect anything different.

Last week we tried to contact the center's owners, Hall Equities Group of Walnut Creek California, asking for clarification. We were rebuffed, following up late last week with an emailed request for comment, sent to the address on the parking signs. These messages – from three different, unrelated email addresses – were bounced back saying that security or privacy settings had rejected the message. It appears that the company really isn't

interested in hearing from the public. Many people are getting so lathered about this – perhaps because they can't face the horror of Medicaid cuts and need a distraction. In fact, the property owners owe us nothing; they could charge for parking without our permission and have no obligation to tell us why. As annoying that it may seem to us, they are under no obligation to answer press queries.

KPTZ brings you local news Tuesday through Thursday at noon and 5pm. To contact us, write news@kptz.org. This is Charlie Bermant. Thank you for listening.