

Why are Americans celebrating a vigilante murderer as a freedom fighter?



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Luigi Mangione, the killer of UnitedHealthCare CEO Brian Thompson, has been stirring up waves of online – but not at himself



Suspected shooter Luigi Mangione is led into the Blair County Courthouse for an extradition hearing December 10, 2024 in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. © Jeff Swensen/Getty Images

A US health insurance CEO's murder has transcended political ideology in uniting average Americans of all stripes against the kind of corruption that would warrant some freedom bombs if it were in a foreign nation of strategic interest to the US.

It's no wonder Washington is hell-bent on banning TikTok. Shortly after a masked man was caught on camera gunning down UnitedHealthCare CEO Brian Thompson in midtown Manhattan on December 4, sparking a manhunt, users flooded the social media app with comments like, "Sorry, I can't help. I didn't see anything because my insurance co-pay was too high for me to afford eyeglasses." Or "This story is getting more coverage than UnitedHealthCare ever provided."

They were mostly amused by the suspect's successful evasion of authorities for several days, and the "deny, defend, depose" inscriptions on the shell casings found at the scene – similar to the "delay, deny, defend" phrase synonymous with the strategy used by health insurance companies to avoid paying out claims to those who have been paying for their coverage.

People popped up asking where they could donate to the suspect's legal fees online, and started posting their own health insurance rejection letters.



As someone who was once surprised to find an \$800 bill for a simple blood test in my mailbox while living in the US, all because my doctor didn't check whether my health insurance actually covered the lab in question before referring me there, it's long been clear that the American healthcare system is a giant racket that's ripping people off.

And those of us who have had the unpleasant experience of paying hundreds of dollars every month in ever-increasing premiums for private insurance, only to end up in administrative hell dealing with an insurer's attempt to dodge the service you're paying for, have long understood the problem.

Know who really wasn't amused by this violent manifestation of it? The Democratic Party governor of the state of Pennsylvania, where the 26-year-old suspect, Luigi Mangione, was turned in to police – at a McDonald's in Altoona, whose online reviews are now rife with reports of "rats" (in the snitch sense).

"Some attention in this case, especially online, has been deeply disturbing, as some have looked to celebrate instead of condemning this killer," said Governor John Shapiro. That's quite a different tune from September, when Shapiro was celebrating killings himself by autographing ammunition alongside Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky at an army ammunition plant in the state.



"We must all do our part in the fight for freedom – from the workers in Scranton who make Pennsylvania the arsenal of democracy to the brave Ukrainian soldiers protecting their country," Shapiro said at the time.

But what about protecting Americans from predatory profiteers? He and his pals have done such a bang-up job that a not-insignificant number of Americans are now cheering a symbolic act of murder like it was the political assassination of an authoritarian regime.

And maybe that's exactly the best way to view it, if they're really struggling to wrap their minds around it. Washington is quick to portray foreign leaders who happen to be in the way of its ambitions as oppressive and victimizing their own people. Yet, when it comes to the health system and its executives at home, making tens of millions of dollars in annual compensation as a reward for increasing profits in part by limiting claim payouts to sick people and raising costs, they're selectively blind to the exploitation.

There's a reason why online "wanted" style graphics, which almost immediately started to circulate online with the headshots and accompanying salaries of private health insurance CEOs (and a large red "X" over Thompson's) resembles an FBI most-wanted terrorist list.

The military industrial complex requires external enemies and an entire national security machinery to actively scare up taxpayer cash for domestic profits. But the medical industrial complex just requires turning a blind eye to the system already in place. Both are equally dysfunctional, but there's a sense that wars can at least be stopped. Ceasefires and peace treaties can be enacted. The violence grabs headlines. **People's quiet suffering doesn't. But where does the average person paying more and more for less and less care even turn in their plight? A single violent act has galvanized them online, Arab Spring style, and elevated the typically silent struggles of millions of Americans to front page headlines.**

A manifesto, attributed to Mangione, smacks of guerrilla warfare. "Frankly, these parasites simply had it coming... The US has the #1 most expensive healthcare system in the world, yet we rank roughly #42 in life expectancy. United is the largest company in the US by market cap, behind only Apple, Google, Walmart. It has grown and grown, but has our life expectancy? No, the reality is these have simply gotten too powerful, and

they cannot continue to abuse our country for immense profit because the American public has allowed them to get away with it," it says.

"I do not pretend to be the most qualified person to lay out the full argument," Mangione wrote, allegedly opting to cede the floor to Mr. Bullet instead.

The trial should be interesting. Seems like an opportunity to compel disclosure of the industry's methods and tactics. A Manhattan jury just acquitted an army veteran of criminally negligent homicide for a chokehold on an aggressive subway rider. It's hard to imagine that a Manhattan jury's life experiences won't somehow impact a verdict in this case.

In the meantime, violence is not supposed to be how civilized people resolve problems in America. **Such methods are reserved for the US establishment against its targets, not for ingrates living in the Best Nation On Earth™**