In the United States today the wealthiest 1 percent of the population owns more than the bottom 95 percent. In this, the richest country in history, some 45 million Americans have no health insurance, and we have, by far, the highest rate of childhood poverty among economically advanced nations. Today, often under great stress, Americans work longer hours than do people in other industrialized nations while the system providing child care for their children is a disaster. In my state of Vermont, as throughout the country, many senior citizens are unable to afford the prescription drugs they need, because they have no Medicare prescription drug benefit and because the prices we pay for medications are the highest in the world. Further, far from being mended and extended, our social safety net is unraveling.

Frighteningly, in our country today more and more of our citizens are giving up on the political process. Indeed, the vast majority of poor people and young people do not participate in politics, and have no faith in it. Most young people in our schools are ignorant and misinformed about the most basic elements of the American political structure, or how to influence it. Meanwhile, the rich contribute massively and outrageously every year to both major political parties, and their lobbyists have enormous impact over decision making in Washington, D.C., including decision making on social policy.

Our media, which is heavily dominated by corporate interests, tells us what news we are supposed to consider important—in twelve-second sound
bites. We hear, see, and read more than we ever wanted to know about O. J. Simpson and Bill Clinton’s sex life, about fires, murders, and hurricanes—but we are told very little about the realities of life for the majority of people in this country. We are told we should care deeply about who wins the Super Bowl but not about how much control we should have over our lives. We have the “power” to decide which designer jeans we should buy but no power to stop our job from going to China or to ensure that we will receive adequate health care. We have “free choice” over what TV channel we watch but little choice about the horrendously long and stressful hours that so many of us have to work.

*The Assault on Social Policy* examines the usual suspects in a fashion that has become all too rare. Thus William Roth investigates poverty, welfare, health, and the Social Security system we will take up in Congress. He also examines less usual subjects like disability and children, which raises the question of why such issues have been customarily left to the margins of our debate. He considers the impacts of economics, politics, technology, corporations, the media, and globalization on our social policy. The lack of such consideration makes debate about social policy less meaningful and leads to a lesser likelihood of changing social policy for the better. Perhaps most important, Roth’s book measures social policy against people and their rights and needs. That people should be the measure of social policy is obvious, but this perspective is disturbingly novel and refreshing.

Roth’s excellent and provocative book, *The Assault on Social Policy*, addresses some of the major trends in American social and political life. And he approaches his subject from a strong bias: He firmly believes in democracy and the right of the people, not multinational corporations, to make the important decisions that affect our lives. He warns us about the growing influence of corporate America in almost every aspect of our society: politics, health care, education, Social Security, the media, and, importantly, on how we approach social policy in this country.

Roth focuses on questions of enormous consequence. Are the goals of social policy in this country to improve the lives of all people, or are they to increase the profit margins of the wealthy? Should the most important decisions affecting the men, women, and children of this country be made in open, democratic, and public debate, or should they be made behind the closed doors of large corporations? In a democratic, civilized society, what are each of us entitled to as human beings?

Roth has written an impressive book that should be read by every member
of Congress, by all students of social policy, and everyone else who is con-
cerned about the future of this country and our basic institutions. He has
written a book that challenges us when he states that democracy means “rule
of civic society exercised of, by, and for the people. Such democracy is rare
and difficult to achieve, but it is hardly impossible. The liberty we expect is
hard to come by and requires constant vigilance, but liberty is also far from
impossible.”

William Roth’s book should be dissected and debated, which is what he
is asking us to do. At a time when wealthy corporate interests have more
power than they have ever had, we must undertake a thorough examination
of all aspects of our society, and struggle for ways to make our nation and
our globe more democratic and more just. This book will be a valuable tool
in that struggle.

Representative Bernard Sanders
Member of Congress
Independent-Vermont