

## **Reactions to CEO killing exposes frustration with the health system,**

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The killing of the UnitedHealthcare chief executive Brian Thompson has mesmerized a deeply polarized nation that shares a collective frustration over dealings with health insurance companies. On social media, some people have cheered for the gunman and expressed little remorse over the death of Mr. Thompson, 50, a father of two boys from Maple Grove, Minn., with some painting him as the villain in a national health care crisis.

And now that the identity of the suspect, Luigi Mangione, 26, has been revealed and more photos of him have emerged, he is being defended or even applauded in some circles. That adulation reflects public anger over health care, said Nsikan Akpan, managing editor for Think Global Health, a publication that explores health issues at the Council on Foreign Relations. “The UHC killing and the social media response stem from people feeling helpless over health coverage and income inequality,” he said. The topic is so often ignored by American public officials, he said, that voters have stopped listing it as a top priority.

Experts who reviewed the flood of social media posts expressing support for Mr. Mangione said that while it can be difficult to assess the provenance of posts, none have the telltale signs of an “influence campaign” by a foreign entity.

Along with the more shocking posts online that have supported Mr. Mangione, numerous comments expressed anger at the murder of a man who spent years rising through the ranks of corporate America.

No evidence has yet emerged that Mr. Mangione had a specific grievance with care provided by UnitedHealthcare or its parent company, UnitedHealth Group. In a short manifesto recovered from his backpack, he criticized United as “too powerful” and as abusing “our country for immense profit” but does not mention any of his own interactions with the company, or if he was enrolled in its coverage. Mr. Mangione’s document tracks in part with the outrage that many Americans feel. As UnitedHealthcare’s market capitalization has grown, he wrote, American life expectancy has not. His writings also condemn companies that “continue to abuse our country for immense profit because the American public has allowed them to get away with it. These parasites had it coming,” read the manifesto. It added: “I do apologize for any strife and trauma, but it had to be done.”

The anger over the U.S. health care system has long been explored in popular culture.

In “John Q,” Denzel Washington plays a man whose son needs a heart transplant but whose insurance won’t cover it. In the slasher movie “Saw,” the killer targets the man who denied him insurance coverage for an experimental cancer treatment. A chemistry teacher named Walter White starts cooking methamphetamine to pay his medical bills in the series “Breaking Bad.”

That sentiment has grown in recent years, health insurance executives, policy experts and pollsters say, fueled by the rising costs of medical care and the emergence of huge bureaucracies that make seeing the doctor more difficult. “The wealth gap has closed, and there is no amount of money that can buy you good insurance.” Said Michael Perry, a pollster who has conducted hundreds of health care focus groups over the past decade.

Meanwhile, health insurance companies are profiting. The division overseen by Mr. Thompson reported \$281 billion in revenue last year and provided coverage to more than 50 million Americans via plans for individuals, employers and people in government programs like Medicare. Mr. Thompson earned a total compensation package last year of \$10.2 million.

On social media, some posts are openly rooting for Mr. Mangione, an Ivy League graduate who was valedictorian of his private high school class and who comes from an influential real estate family in the Baltimore area. Commenters swooned over his looks; “Dave Franco” was trending on the

social media platform X on Monday night, with users suggesting the actor play Mr. Mangione in a movie about the murder. “Free Luigi” T-shirts were offered for sale.

The posts and commentary celebrating a murder suspect are crass yet not particularly unfamiliar in a country that has sometimes celebrated frontier justice and revenge killings. “There’s a long, long history of vigilantism in the United States dating to pre-Revolutionary times of people taking the law into their own hands because they don’t think they can get justice any other way,” said Michael Asimow, a professor at Santa Clara University School of Law.