



Medicare: Leave It Alone!

Beware, anyone who is old or disabled or might ever get old or disabled.

The Republican budget privatizes Medicare and turns it into a voucher program that would hurt the old, the future old, and the disabled. As [AARP said](#) about it: "Removing the Medicare guarantee of affordable health coverage for older Americans by implementing a premium support system and asking seniors and future retirees to pay more is not the right direction."

Why would our Republican members of Congress do this to the old and the vulnerable? They claim that it will save seniors money and allow them to choose. However, the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) says it will actually cost seniors more. How much more? The CBO says that it would double the cost of insurance for seniors. And that is just for starters. How in the world is someone who is 89 and ill supposed to "shop around" for a good insurance deal, and what for-profit company would ever choose to insure her? Under Medicare, our parents and grandparents already get to choose. They choose their doctors, their hospital, and their hospice. Republican politicians are deliberately misleading people about this.

Republicans also claim that their plan will somehow drive down costs because they claim that Medicare issues blank checks and does not try to control costs. That also is false. Medicare operating costs run between 3-7% for overhead, while private insurance companies have been passing their overhead costs of up to 37% to their customers. As a USA Today editorial stated about Medicare, "In fact, it delivers coverage for lower costs. Doing away with the most efficient system hardly seems the best way..." Medicare also has set reimbursement rates for hospitals and providers, which helps save money. Still, they must do better with our money, so I am pleased that the health care law gets tougher on waste, fraud, and inefficiency. Improving a great system is better than destroying it, but Republican members of Congress voted to destroy Medicare.

Republican politicians claim this does not hurt seniors or those who are 55 and over. This, too, is false. Their plan would slash Medicaid, even though the elderly who cannot afford to pay for nursing home care use Medicaid. As a matter of fact, 21% of Medicaid dollars is spent on seniors, and 42% is spent on the disabled. That equals 63% of the Medicaid budget! This opens up another problem for middle-class Americans. If the Federal Government is not going to help pay for the nursing home, where will the money come from? Most hardworking middle class families will not be able to pay for their parents and pay for their children's educations. The squeeze will just be too much, so this Medicare and Medicaid slashing will hurt all ages. **OVER→**

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Here is the ugliest part of all. The budget plans from the House Budget Committee in 2011-2013 and 2015-16 hurt the old and the disabled and the middle class. Republicans talk about "shared sacrifice." However, the money that they would "save" would not be used to pay down the deficit. No, it would be used to cut taxes for the very rich. That's right—the very rich would see their taxes reduced while you or your loved one would see essential services reduced.

This is not what Americans really want. Across the country, good people of all parties—Republicans, Democrats, and Independents—have told their members to leave Medicare and other essential programs alone, that they want to support programs that help their neighbors and communities, that they care about each other. House Republicans miscalculated when they figured that most people only care about themselves, so seniors would not speak up for others. Turns out they were wrong.

So what do we need to do to preserve Medicare for future generations? The first step would be to save money by efficiencies in Medicare Part D, the prescription drug benefit. If Medicare could negotiate the price of prescription drugs – like other countries and the Veterans Administration – it could save \$230 billion to \$541 billion over the next ten years, according to the Center for Economic & Policy Research. I voted in 2007 to do just that, and then tried again by repeatedly cosponsoring legislation to do that. But congressional Republicans have ensured that this reform went nowhere by refusing to have a vote on it.

We are a great nation full of good people who help each other. It is the American way. So is Medicare. Leave it alone, House Republicans. Find the money to pay down the debt by voting against tax loopholes, taxpayer subsidies for oil companies and other huge conglomerates, by cutting waste, and by campaign finance reform, which will clean up abuse. But leave Medicare alone.

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