

Proposal to eliminate Medicare devalues American Society

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Medicare began providing benefits to older Americans on July 1, 1966, and for 45 years has become the key health insurance provider for Americans past age 65. It is recognized as one of the most important pieces of legislation in our history. Because of Medicare's guaranteed coverage and benefits, many seniors are able to maintain their standard of living and rest easy knowing that their health care needs are met. Without the security of Medicare, many of my senior constituents would be living in poverty.

However, Republican leaders in Congress want to end Medicare and replace it with inadequate vouchers for private insurance. The contrast between the current Medicare program and the radical Republican overhaul could not be starker.

Medicare is a guaranteed benefit program for seniors past age 65 that provides coverage for a full array of health care needs like doctor visits and stays in nursing facilities. Because Medicare pays health providers directly, seniors are not responsible for most health costs above their premiums and co-pays, and protections exist to ensure older Medicare beneficiaries aren't paying higher premiums.

In contrast, the Republican plan would eliminate Medicare for everyone under 55 years old. Seniors would instead receive fixed payments to cover expenses of a private insurance plan. The standard amount of this voucher would not increase in the event of a medical emergency or onset of an illness, meaning those who need more health care than the vouchers cover would be forced to pay out-of-pocket.

The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that this would result in at least a \$6,000 increase in seniors' health costs the first year the plan takes effect. Additionally, because this voucher plan doesn't keep up with inflation, out-of-pocket costs would double to \$12,000 within 10 years. A study by the Center for Economic and Policy Research shows that someone aged 44 today would need to save an additional \$287,000 for retirement to cover

increased medical costs.

Republicans claim that because the voucher plan would not take effect for 10 years, leaving those 55 years and older in the current Medicare system, current beneficiaries and those about to be eligible will not experience any changes. That is completely untrue. Under their plan, Republicans would repeal health reform immediately causing an increase in prescription drug costs by eliminating current provisions that provide seniors rebates on drugs in the “donut hole” (which would be eliminated by 2020), and forcing seniors to pay out of pocket for no-cost preventive services such as annual check-ups and cancer screening procedures that are currently free.

The value of a society is measured by how it cares for those who came before. Medicare is more than a health care system; it is a reflection of our belief that seniors and the disabled should be able to live free from the fear that they will be denied health care due to lack of their ability to pay. While I stand firmly committed to reducing the nation’s deficit, I do not support efforts to do so on the back of future generations by dismantling Medicare.