

Remarks for the Honorable Doris O. Matsui
Statement on the Republican 2012 Budget Plan
Thursday, April 14, 2011

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to voice my strong opposition to the Republican budget plan and its effects on America's seniors. I believe that we must address our national deficit, but I believe we can do it in a responsible manner that does not hinder our fragile economy and does not risk important programs.

I support the Democratic budget proposal, which makes practical cuts to reduce our Nation's deficit but without hurting America's seniors and sacrificing their health and financial security.

Mr. Speaker, the Republican plan is irresponsible. It would hurt America's seniors while giving enormous tax breaks to the top 2 percent of the wealthiest Americans. It does nothing to create jobs but gives billions in corporate loopholes and subsidies to Big Oil. Most notably, the Republican plan would literally end Medicare. And while this may be a new plan, these are not new ideas.

The Republicans' 2012 budget attempts to do to Medicare what President Bush wanted to do to Social Security in 2005 -- privatize it and severely cut benefits.

Mr. Speaker, can you imagine if we had privatized Social Security in 2005 the way the Republicans wanted to do just before the biggest financial collapse since the Great Depression? Is that what we really want to do with Medicare? We cannot afford to have Wall Street control the fate of our seniors.

The Republican plan would convert Medicare into a voucher program that forces seniors to buy costly private insurance plans. It asks seniors, half of whom have less than \$19,000 a year in total income, to pay more and get less. If this plan were put in place, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has estimated that the average senior would end up paying nearly three times more out-of-pocket expenses.

Meanwhile, the health care law enacted last year is already helping to close the gap in prescription drug coverage known as the doughnut hole and provides annual exams and preventive services. But a repeal of the health care law, as the Republican budget plan calls for, would eliminate these benefits. Mr. Speaker, these benefits for Medicare patients are making a real difference in the lives of my constituents.

I recently heard from a 71-year-old woman from Sacramento who requires several expensive drugs to maintain her health. In October of 2010, she was worried about her ability to pay for her medication because she fell into the coverage gap. But she was relieved to learn that she would get \$250 in 2010 and that 50 percent of her costs would be reimbursed this year and even more would be reimbursed in the future. But now Republicans want to pull the rug out from under our seniors and their families.

What is astonishing to me is that in addition to privatization of Medicare, the Republican plan also goes after Medicaid. Instead of making real reform to the Medicaid program, the Republican budget calls for converting Medicaid into a block grant program. That would sharply reduce funding for seniors and low-income Americans on Medicaid so that it would not keep up with health care costs.

Medicaid helps keep our seniors in their homes and helps them afford nursing homes if they need them, but the Republican plan would leave seniors on their own and ignores the promise that our country has made from one generation to another.

Mr. Speaker, the Federal budget should reflect our American values that have been passed down for generations where seniors earn the benefits that they have paid into and have been promised and are able to enjoy their retirement after working hard in their careers.

That is why I will continue to fight to protect the dignity of America's seniors and protect them against the devastating effects of the Republican budget proposal.