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Seniors Task Force Co-Chairs Highlight Importance of Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security for American Women, Families

Protecting Programs Are Imperative to Empowering Women's Health and Financial Security

WASHINGTON – Today, House Democratic Caucus Seniors Task Force co-chairs Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) and Congresswoman Doris Matsui (D-CA) recognized Women's Equality Day and highlighted Democratic efforts to protect women and families from GOP attacks on Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. The co-chairs also underscored the importance the programs have in ensuring the health and financial security of American women and families.

"Women's Equality Day provides an opportunity to celebrate the women in American history who have championed women's rights and reflect on the need to build on their achievements to address the financial struggles that women still face," said Rep. Schakowsky. "Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid are three success stories. Women, who generally live longer than men and bear more family care-giving responsibilities, understand the value of these health and retirement security programs. We are committed to fighting to protect these programs because we know what life would be like for our families without them. We also know that we have more work to do. We need to achieve equal pay, equal opportunity and equal access to halls of power."

"For most Americans, retirement security is inextricably linked to Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security; for American women, these programs are not only important for their own health and retirement plans, but also for their families. As primary caregivers, women are tending both to their children and their parents as they get older. This means that retirement security looms large for women, both in planning for their own future but also as they work to ensure a dignified retirement for their parents," said Rep. Matsui. "Members of the Seniors Task Force will

continue to speak out against GOP plans to undermine the health and financial security of American women and their families.”

Democrats in Congress are committed to protecting these programs from Republican plans to end them – a plan that they have repeatedly brought before the House of Representatives. For example, on April 15, 2011, House Republicans passed their budget to end Medicare and replace it with an inadequate voucher to buy private insurance, for those now under 55. The GOP plan ultimately would increase out-of-pocket health care costs for the typical senior by more than \$6,000, put seniors at the mercy of private insurance companies, and would no longer guarantee seniors the same level of benefits and choice of doctor that they have today under Medicare.

This GOP plan to end Medicare would have an even more damaging impact on America’s women, because women, on average, are even more dependent on Medicare than men. Women represent 56 percent of the Medicare population, are among the oldest Medicare beneficiaries (ages 85 and older), 70 percent are women, and 49 percent of women on Medicare have three or more chronic health conditions, compared to 38 percent of men. The increased health care costs under the GOP Medicare plan would be particularly hard for women to bear: 57 percent of women on Medicare live below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, compared to 45 percent of men.

Similarly, the GOP plans to slash Medicaid, which pays for nursing home care for seniors, would have a disproportionate effect on American women, particularly because – on average – women live longer than men. Currently, more than 70 percent of nursing home residents are women. According to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office, the GOP plan would cut federal Medicaid spending by 35 percent by 2022 and by 49 percent in 2030. Because the GOP plan would require such deep cuts in federal Medicaid funding, the GOP plan would result in less coverage for nursing home residents and shift more of the cost of nursing home care to seniors and their families.

House Democrats have also stood firm in their efforts to protect Social Security from Republican efforts to privatize it. Like cuts to Medicare and Medicaid, GOP efforts to privatize Social Security would have a particularly damaging impact on women, since women, on average, are even more dependent on Social Security than men for their retirement security. In fact, Social Security is virtually the only source of income for three in ten women on Social Security who are 65 and older, compared to two in ten men. Among Social Security beneficiaries 80 and older, Social Security is virtually the only source of income for 38 percent of women, compared to 25 percent of men. The average Social Security benefit for women 65 and older is only about

\$12,000 per year, compared to nearly \$16,000 for men 65 and older. The hard truth is that without Social Security, half of women 65 and older would be below the poverty line.

As the debate over the future of these programs continue, the co-chairs of the Seniors Task Force will continue to highlight the devastating effects that GOP plans to cut Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security would have on American women and families. For more information on the Democratic Caucus Seniors Task Force, visit democrats.gov/seniors .

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