

## **Medicare Under Attack...Again**

By Ron Harrell

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Since it was signed into law on July 30, 1965, Medicare has joined Social Security as one of the GOP's perennial targets in their war on working families.

On April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011, House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-WI) launched the latest salvo, laying out a plan which he claims would "save" Medicare.

How?

By forcing future Medicare recipients, those currently 54 or younger, into financial ruin. In his analysis, Associated Press writer Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar (April 11, 2011) says that according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) under Ryan's plan, by the year 2030 those Americans would typically be paying about two-thirds of their medical costs. Noam Levey, writing for the Los Angeles Times (April 7, 2011), says that under Ryan's plan, "Even as the federal government cuts its own spending, seniors would end up paying almost twice as much out of their own pockets — or more than \$12,510 a year, the CBO estimates. Altogether, the total cost of insurance would be higher." According to the Alliance for Retired Americans (April 8, 2011), that "more than \$12,510 a year" could be as much as \$20,000.

Looking at these numbers, Nobel prize-winning economist Paul Krugman (April 7, 2011) says, "the plan would deprive many and probably most seniors of adequate health care."

Writing for the Economic Policy Institute, Ethan Pollack, Rebecca Theiss and Andrew Fieldhouse (April 7, 2011) say Ryan's proposal, "...eliminates Medicare as we know it, shifting costs onto seniors." They also note, "This plan puts money directly into the pockets of insurance companies, which are much less efficient than Medicare."

The Ryan proposal also repeals the Affordable Care Act, terminating all the benefits for seniors in the law, including provisions that require no co-payments for preventive services, free annual visits and closing the doughnut hole.

Aside from an enormous shift of costs onto the shoulders of future retirees, by the year 2033 Ryan's plan would also raise the age for Medicare eligibility from 65 to 67.

As bad as this looks for seniors, there is some good news: As Alonso-Zaldivar notes, "Republicans may escape the full wrath of seniors; however, since the House budget isn't likely to get very far, it won't pass the Democratic-run Senate. House members can vote for the budget's tough medicine without having to dish it out before they run for re-election, but Democrats running against them in 2012 won't let voters forget the budget..."