

MEDICAID

Question: Are you going to be able to reach agreement with the Republicans on Medicaid?

Answer: I am determined to reach agreement and balance the budget, but I am determined to do it in a way that reflects America's values. My balanced budget proposal protects Medicare, Medicaid, education and the environment, while giving working Americans a modest tax cut.

We could agree on a balanced budget tomorrow. Democrats and Republicans have already agreed on enough cuts to balance the budget in seven years and give working Americans a tax cut. We also have some agreement on Medicaid. I agree that we can give states more flexibility to manage their programs better. That's why I would repeal the Boren Amendment and allow states to use managed care without seeking waivers. But the Republicans want to go far beyond what is necessary. They would end the guarantee to meaningful health benefits for millions of people with disabilities, pregnant women, poor children and older Americans in need of nursing home care. They would leave states vulnerable to economic downturns, inflation and other circumstances beyond their control that lead to increases in enrollment.

I believe we will reach agreement because balancing the budget is the right thing to do. But we must do it in a way that is consistent with our values.

Question: Do you support the National Governors' Association Medicaid resolution?

Answer: The Governors have made real progress by coming up with a plan in which funding increases as enrollment grows. They have also proposed -- as I did in my Medicaid plan -- to give states unprecedented flexibility to manage their programs better. For example, both proposals would repeal the Boren Amendment and allow states to use managed care without seeking waivers.

However, I have some concerns. We need to be sure that Medicaid remains a real guarantee. We have to maintain eligibility for the millions of poor children, pregnant women, people with disabilities and older Americans who receive medical services through Medicaid today, ensure that the benefits provided are meaningful, and preserve people's ability to enforce their rights adequately.

HEALTH CARE QUESTIONS

GENERAL

Question: Now that the difference between the Republican cuts and your cuts in Medicare is only \$44 and the difference in Medicaid is only \$26 billion, why can't you agree on a balanced budget deal?

Answer: There are still real differences between my plan and theirs. First, they cut Medicare 35% more than I would -- even though it is not needed to balance the budget or extend the trust fund for at least ten years. They cut Medicaid by 45% more. In addition, they have proposed policy changes that I believe will have serious consequences for the health and well-being of the over 60 million Americans who rely on these programs.

Medicaid. In Medicaid, they would end the guarantee to meaningful benefits and replace it with an underfunded block grant. Between three and six million Americans could be denied coverage in 2002, including more than one million children. This would mean more people without insurance coverage, more uncompensated care, and more cost shifting to people with private insurance.

Block grants also leave states vulnerable. States would be responsible for 100% of additional costs caused by economic downturns, demographic changes and other circumstances beyond their control. The per capita cap that I have proposed protects coverage and states because federal dollars increase as more people need Medicaid.

Medicare. In Medicare, the Republicans propose a number of changes that I disagree with. First, they increase premiums for people on Medicare. Second, they create new plans -- like medical savings accounts -- that will pull healthier, wealthier beneficiaries out of the traditional program, leaving it with older, sicker and more costly beneficiaries. At the same time, they place an arbitrary cap on spending in traditional Medicare. This will cost the program more and, even worse, will place the beneficiaries left in the traditional Medicare program at risk. My plan gives beneficiaries more choices -- like provider sponsored organizations and managed care plans with point of service options -- while making sure plans compete on quality and cost, not by avoiding sicker people who are poor insurance risks.

I have shown that we can balance the budget -- in seven years and as certified by the Congressional Budget Office -- while protecting Medicare and Medicaid and respecting America's values. We simply don't need to make the severe changes to Medicare and Medicaid proposed by the Republicans.

MEDICARE

Question: Aren't the Republicans simply slowing the rate of growth in Medicare rather than actually cutting it?

Answer: Under the Republican Medicare plan, federal spending per person will be \$600 less per person in 2002 than under my Medicare plan and significantly below the private sector. We all agree that the rate of growth in federal health programs needs to be slowed. But the Republicans go way beyond what is needed to balance the budget and way beyond what is needed to extend the Trust Fund.

MEDICAID/SAFETY NET

Question: What impact will the Republican budget have on Medicare beneficiaries with low incomes?

Answer: Today, Medicaid covers Medicare premiums, deductibles, and copayments for older Americans and people with disabilities living near or below the poverty line. The Republicans would end this guarantee, forcing many people to lose coverage for doctor services. They don't set aside any Medicaid funding for deductibles and copayments, and set aside less than half of what is needed to cover Medicare premiums. Hundreds of thousands of poor older Americans and people with disabilities could lose funding for their premiums -- just as the Republicans raise premiums.

My proposal preserves this guarantee of coverage for more than 5 million people.

Question: Do you support loosening regulation of nursing homes?

Answer: Since I took office, we have done a thorough review of health care regulations. We've cut back on duplicative rules, reduced paperwork burdens and moved to performance standards. But what the Republicans have proposed is wrong. They would repeal federal enforcement of nursing home quality standards that have dramatically improved the quality of care. Since these standards were signed into law by President Reagan, there has been a 50% reduction in dehydration among nursing home residents, and a 25% reduction in the use of physical restraints. We owe it to our parents to make sure nursing homes are safe and clean.