

WASHINGTON, DC—Today, Congressmen Joe Courtney (D-CT), Lloyd Doggett (D-TX), and 88 House Democrats urged President Obama to reject House Republican efforts to raise the Medicare eligibility age during ongoing debt negotiations.

“With some of our colleagues still determined to hold ongoing debt negotiations hostage over their ideological priorities, it is critical that we make clear our commitment to maintaining the Medicare eligibility age. Raising the Medicare eligibility age doesn’t cut costs—it simply shifts those costs to those who depend on Medicare, to younger Americans who buy insurance through the new health insurance exchanges and to states,” they wrote.

The Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that the costs to states and the private sector would be twice as large as the savings— \$11.4 billion in costs versus \$5.7 billion in net federal savings. A phased-in approach as included in the Ryan Republican Budget produces no budget savings over the next decade.

The letter concludes, **“As we continue to work to develop a response to rising health care costs and make Medicare stronger, we urge you in the strongest possible terms against changing the eligibility age of this vital part of retirement security.”**

Full text of the letter to President Obama follows below.

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We salute your leadership in seeking tax fairness for all. Furthermore, we understand the importance of balancing fiscal responsibility with the responsibility to meet fundamental public needs. We certainly agree that the Bush tax cuts should be allowed to expire for the top 2

percent of American taxpayers, returning to the Clinton Administration level. This change would occur automatically if Congress failed to act by the end of the year. Some of our colleagues, who have long questioned the value of Medicare, have urged that in return for allowing these tax rates to return to their prior levels, we should terminate Medicare for millions of seniors. As Minority Leader Pelosi put it so eloquently, "It was their trophy in the talks on the fiscal cliff -- the price they asked seniors to pay before they voted to ask the wealthiest to pay their fair share." This would be unacceptable.

Raising the Medicare age doesn't cut costs—it simply shifts those costs to those who depend on Medicare, to younger Americans who buy insurance through the new health insurance exchanges, and to states. The Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that the costs to states and the private sector would be *twice* as large as the savings-- \$11.4 billion in costs versus \$5.7 billion in net federal savings. For our colleagues to consider raising the eligibility age illustrates that their desire has less to do with addressing rising longer health care costs than it does being able to claim an ideological triumph.

As the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities recently concluded on raising the Medicare eligibility age:

"The goal should be to slow the growth of health care costs system-wide, while extending coverage to all Americans. This proposal does just the opposite on both fronts — raising costs system-wide and increasing the ranks of the uninsured."

Our nation's older Americans have worked a lifetime for the promise of Social Security and Medicare. For those 65-and 66-year-olds who would now be denied the security of Medicare, their out-of-pocket costs would increase by \$3.7 billion. Paying more for their health care isn't the only negative impact on our nation's older Americans. Raising the Medicare eligibility age to 67 would also increase the population of uninsured seniors by at least 270,000 people.

While the House Republican budget phased in this change for those 54 and below, this only delays the pain. And such a phased approach would produce no budget savings for the next decade. It only indicates that this Republican proposal is about ideology, not deficit reduction.

Even though we have made great progress addressing long-term rising health care costs with the passage of the Affordable Health Care Act, and even though the eligibility age for Social Security benefits is gradually increasing, it will do great harm to our economy and millions of seniors to raise the Medicare eligibility age or enact other significant cost-shifting alternatives.

We do understand it is important to meet the challenge of rising health care costs, that is why we were willing to vote for changes to Medicare and in doing so, extended the solvency of the Medicare Trust Fund by almost another decade.

As we continue to work to develop a response to rising health care costs and make Medicare stronger, we urge you in the strongest possible terms against changing the eligibility age of this vital part of retirement security.

Sincerely,

Lloyd Doggett, Joe Courtney, John Larson, Louise Slaughter, John Lewis, Jan Schakowsky, Allyson Schwartz, Raul Grijalva, Frank Pallone, Barney Frank, John Tierney, Danny Davis, Henry Waxman, Bobby Scott, Kathy Castor, Earl Blumenauer, Mel Watt, Bill Pascrell, Elijah Cummings, Al Green, Janice Hahn, Jim McDermott, Sheila Jackson Lee, Judy Chu, Robert Brady, Charles Rangel, Gene Green, Rosa DeLauro, Marcia Fudge, Corrine Brown, Eddie Bernice Johnson, Eleanor Holmes Norton, John Yarmuth, Karen Bass, Brad Miller, Peter DeFazio Mike Honda, Ted Deutch, Yvette Clarke, Sam Farr, Jose Serrano, Bennie Thompson, Alcee Hastings, Jim Langevin, Keith Ellison, Rush Holt, Paul Tonko, Tim Bishop, Peter Welch, Bill Keating, Chellie Pingree, Colleen Hanabusa, Jim McGovern, Jerrold Nadler, Steve Cohen, John Sarbanes, Linda Sanchez, Doris Matsui, Carolyn Maloney, Emanuel Cleaver, Suzanne Bonamici, John Garamendi, David Cicilline, Donald Payne, Jackie Speier, Maxine Waters, Kerry Bentivolio, Lynn Woolsey, Russ Carnahan, Maurice Hinchey, John Olver, Betty Sutton

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