

benefits rationed more and more with every passing year.

I have heard a lot of talk in the last few months about the need to make tough choices in this budget. Well, the average senior on Medicare earns just over \$19,000 a year. About one-quarter of Medicare beneficiaries suffer from a cognitive or mental impairment, and many have at least one or more chronic medical conditions. I ask my Republican colleagues, what exactly is it about stripping these Americans bare of their health and economic security that qualifies as tough? There is nothing tough about stealing from the poor, the weak and the frail to give to the rich.

Our seniors, on the other hand, know all about tough choices. Do I buy groceries or do I buy prescriptions? Do I pay rent or do I pay medical bills? It hurts, but how much will it cost? These are tough choices. These are life-and-death choices.

With the passage of Medicare in 1965, we entered into a covenant with every American citizen. This budget breaks that promise and brings us back to square one. The Republican voucher plan ends Medicare. Instead, seniors will be on their own, with a measly voucher and forced to buy insurance in the private market, where all decisions will be profit-driven. More profits for insurance companies on the backs of seniors—sounds like a Republican plan to me.

This new voucher program amounts to a ration card, and the value of the voucher is not linked to increases in health care costs in the private market. Yet the costs of private health insurance have risen over 5,000 percent since the creation of Medicare—5,000 percent.

The analysis of the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has estimated that in less than 20 years, the vouchers under the Republican road-to-ruin budget would pay just 32 cents on every dollar that a senior spends on health care.

Now, the Republicans have repeatedly stated that their budget gives seniors the same coverage as Members of Congress. Well, as a Member of Congress myself, I know that our health plans pay for about 72 cents on every dollar of our health coverage, not 32 cents on the dollar.

According to CBO, the voucher program will provide a ration of \$8,000 to seniors every year to purchase their health care from private insurance companies. Yet the private insurance premium charged by Blue Cross in 2010 for a Member of Congress was well over \$9,000. Does anyone honestly believe that sick senior citizens and people with permanent disabilities will be able to find coverage from private insurance for \$8,000 when they are now charging over \$9,000 to Members of Congress?

According to The Wall Street Journal, the average cost of health care for seniors over 65 in 2009 was \$11,743. If an

insurance company were to take on \$11,743 of risk for \$8,000, they would be out of business in short order. But Republicans don't believe their insurance company buddies will actually offer coverage for \$8,000 or even for \$11,743 just to break even. They know that seniors will have to go into their pockets for thousands of dollars as this plan hands Medicare over to the private insurance companies to make even more profits. In fact, CBO found that seniors will have to pay more than twice as much out of pocket as they do today.

This budget takes trillions from seniors and rations their care, and where does it shift the savings? Well, if you guessed permanent tax cuts for millionaires and a new tax break for corporations making billions, you guessed right. After more than a year of hurling lies and demagoguery about death panels and rationing care, Republicans on the panel before us have demanded that we restrict seniors to a health care ration card and ensure that those who cannot afford coverage on their own will be left to suffer or die. Well, therein is the real death penalty they once talked about. They pay lip service to Americans' responsibility to share the burden and instead steal from those who cannot afford an expensive lobbyist and give to millionaires and billionaires and companies that can afford much, much more.

I'm not speaking of playing politics. America knows that our budget is a statement of priorities and values, not purely dollars and cents. America's families set priorities with their own budget each and every day. And I respectfully and honestly disagree with the values and priorities that the Republicans have established in their road-to-ruin budget. Let's not end Medicare.

I'VE HEARD THAT SONG BEFORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. McCOTTER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. McCOTTER. Ah, the new civility. I would like to start, Mr. Speaker, by thanking my Democratic colleagues this morning for disabusing me of an affliction. When I woke up, I found that I had a hankering to listen to Led Zepelin, and I couldn't figure out why. This has happened before, usually when I leave the TV on at night and they run one of those Rolling Stones '70s buy it now before it's more expensive or in the dustbin ads. So I was walking over here and I'm thinking, wow, is it because there's been a communication breakdown between the parties? It's possible. It's possible. I said, Is it because one of the nice Senators is wearing a cashmere sweater? It's possible. But, no, I was sitting here today when I realized why I wanted to listen to the melodious strains of Page, Plant, Jones, and John Bonham. It's because for the Democratic Party, the song remains the same.

Once again, seniors and children wake to the hysterical, frightening visage of specters of gloom and doom—Democrats. Once again, we are regaled with the Democrats' entitlement reform plan. It is called do nothing, spend everything, go bankrupt, benefits bye-bye.

We continue to see a party that does not understand you cannot lift an economy when it is crushed beneath the weight of Big Government. We continue to see a party ideologically zealous in spending your tax dollars on Planned Parenthood to the point where they would shut down the Federal Government to do it. And we continue to hear the fundamental crux of the issue of a potential government shutdown. The Democratic Party will shut down the government so they can spend more of your money. The Republican Party is committed to keeping the government open and spending less of your money.

In fairness, it is not just Led Zepelin they remind me of, because the reason we stand here today on the precipice of a government shutdown is because they did not do their work when they had total control of the United States Congress last year. They could not even pass a budget, let alone finish these appropriations which we are still dealing with well into April, let alone lay out a coherent strategy to do so when the parties changed power in this House.

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The song remains the same, but the American people recognize the song and dance. They will not be fooled. They know that the major change that we see before us today in the fight over government spending is a very simple one, and a very simple choice. It is the difference between bankruptcy and solvency; and the Republican Party stands for solvency and for liberty.

IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. BACA) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BACA. Mr. Speaker, we find ourselves less than 24 hours away from abandoning our veterans—I state, from abandoning our veterans, our seniors, and our active duty military personnel. Why? You ask yourself, Why? Because Republicans refuse to budge from a fiscal plan that will cost our Nation 700,000 jobs and the anti-government tea party is dead set on shutting government.

In my district in California's Inland Empire, we face a 14 percent unemployment rate. My constituents need jobs. Our priorities now should be about creating jobs, not about shutting government. We all know the devastation of the consequences of a shutdown. Eligible seniors and disabled Americans would be unable to apply for Medicare and Medicaid benefits. Can you imagine someone that needs medical assistance and they can't get it, the impact