

Medicare physicians will face a 30-percent pay cut. Imagine that. Today many Medicare patients already are being denied the care and personal choice they deserve because the AMA, the American Medical Association, has said one in three primary doctors is limiting Medicare patients, and more than one in eight of those doctors is forced to deny Medicare patients altogether.

Our seniors already face the pain of a broken Medicare system. Yet the Democrats remain ostriches with their heads in the sand because they have no Medicare solutions they want to offer.

Perhaps I am being too hard on the Democrats. President Obama—perhaps speaking for the Democrats or perhaps not—has put an option on the table for addressing Medicare spending. He did it in a speech at George Washington University on December 13. Of course, we will not be able to vote on that here today because, as Senator MCCONNELL said yesterday, you cannot vote for a speech. But at least we should consider the option the President put on the table.

In his speech, President Obama suggested we should control costs in Medicare by tasking the Independent Payment Advisory Board that was set up under ObamaCare to do even more than what we proposed a year and a half ago when the bill was passed.

You might ask, What is the Independent Payment Advisory Board in ObamaCare? Well, it was created by the Democrats' health care bill. It is a 15-member panel of unelected advisers who would make binding recommendations on how to reduce Medicare spending when spending is projected to exceed a certain level. Effectively, their recommendations have the force of law without congressional intervention to replace the cuts they might suggest and that under the law would take a 60-percent majority. And you know it is very difficult to get 60 votes in this body for any one thing.

That law says the board cannot make decisions that directly relate to premiums, deductibles, or copayments that Medicare beneficiaries pay. It says the board cannot change the eligibility criteria for Medicare benefits. So then, what can the board do, you may ask? Well, it is going to zero in on provider payments, doctor payments.

I want to repeat a statistic I quoted earlier because after the payment review board gets done, you are going to have more than the one in three primary doctors not taking Medicare patients that presently is the situation. We have one out of eight doctors denying Medicare patients altogether. In other words, they are not going to see Medicare patients; and that is today. It is going to get worse when this payment review board gets done.

According to the Joint Economic Committee, today Medicare allows medical providers to collect 89 percent of the cost of services provided to seniors. Under the President's proposal, by

2022, Medicare providers will only be allowed to collect 66 percent of the cost of services provided to seniors. Reductions will clearly restrict seniors' access to quality health care.

Let me sum up what we do know about the Democrats' actions on Medicare because it is already on a path to destruction. So, of course, I get a little bit upset when I hear people on the other side of the aisle saying Republicans want to do away with Medicare, when it is part of the social fabric of America and we want to keep it as part of the social fabric of America and we want to do it not only because it is a Federal program, but we want to do it because it is tied in with a lot of corporate retirement health plans where it becomes a primary payer and the corporate health plan becomes a secondary or additional payer.

I sum up by saying, they have enacted already \$500 billion worth of cuts to fund a new entitlement called ObamaCare. Many of those cuts are described by the independent CMS Actuary as unsustainable. They have yet to find a way to fix the doctor reimbursement formula called the sustainable growth rate. And still, the President has proposed further reducing payments to providers.

Of course, what is that going to do for seniors in America? It is going to reduce access. This will make it harder for seniors to find providers willing to treat them. This will drive some providers out of the business of providing services to seniors. In other words, they cannot afford it.

There is one simple word to describe this approach, and it is a word I do not take lightly. The word is "rationing" of health care for seniors in America. It may not be direct overt rationing, but you have to have your head buried very deeply in the sand not to realize that is going to be the outcome of policies already put in place by this President through ObamaCare. And then they want to accuse us of destroying Medicare?

So I get back to what today's debate is all about. I think we ought to seriously be having a legitimate floor debate rather than a series of political show votes today. I will vote for the Senate to begin debate on the Ryan budget and the other Republican budgets as they are offered because I do not have a chance to vote on anything from that side of the aisle because, see, it is a blank sheet of paper. There is nothing there that the majority party—not the minority party; they are the majority party—has suggested. I will vote to begin debate, not that I support any of their budgets in their entirety. I will vote to begin debate because our fiscal situation demands serious efforts or giving serious considerations, and in no area, as I have made clear in my remarks today, is this more critical than in Medicare because Medicare is on a path to bankruptcy.

People who support the Medicare Program and care about those who will

count on that program today and for many years to come are willing to put serious plans on the table for debate. It is our responsibility to ensure Medicare's survival for future seniors. Doing nothing is worse for Medicare. The surest way to kill Medicare as we know it is the Democrats' do-nothing plan. Demagoguery is irresponsible. So I would suggest: Pull your head out of the sand and join a real debate to save Medicare for the future.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that following my remarks, Senator MCCASKILL be recognized to speak for up to 15 minutes, and following her remarks Senator SESSIONS be recognized to speak for up to 20 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

SMALL BUSINESS ADDITIONAL TEMPORARY EXTENSION ACT OF 2011

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to concur in the House message to accompany S. 990, which the clerk will report by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to concur in the House amendment to S. 990, an Act to provide for an additional temporary extension of programs under the Small Business Act and the Small Business Investment Act of 1958, and for other purposes, with an amendment.

Pending:

Reid motion to concur in the amendment of the House to the bill, with Reid amendment No. 347, of a perfecting nature.

Reid amendment No. 348 (to amendment No. 347), to change the enactment date.

Reid motion to refer the message of the House on the bill to the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship with instructions, Reid amendment No. 349, to change the enactment date.

Reid amendment No. 350 (to (the instructions) amendment No. 349), of a perfecting nature.

Reid amendment No. 351 (to amendment No. 350), of a perfecting nature.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FRANKEN). The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for 10 minutes.