



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on March 19, 2011

Gingrich: No Regrets for Supporting Medicare Drug Coverage

“An unfunded liability,” [explains CNSNews.com](#), “is a benefit the federal government has promised to pay that is not matched by tax revenue to fund it and thus represents an anticipated increase in the national debt.”



The former Speaker of the House was among the most vocal proponents of the 2003 legislation creating the program, [writing](#) in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed: “If you are a fiscal conservative who cares about balancing the federal budget, there may be no more important vote in your career than one in support of this bill.” Gingrich, an American Enterprise Institute senior fellow at the time, apparently did not consult with his colleague Jagadeesh Gokhale, an AEI scholar who [told](#) a congressional subcommittee that the legislation would “cost more, and do less good, than many legislators realize,” possibly adding \$7 trillion to \$12 trillion to the program’s unfunded liability. Gingrich, meanwhile, was [called](#) back to Capitol Hill to convince conservative congressmen to overlook the program’s high cost on the theory that the “reforms” in the bill would balance out the cost of the drug benefit.

It is now plain as day that Gokhale was right and Gingrich was wrong. Medicare’s costs and concomitant liabilities continue to rise rapidly — even more so now that [10,000 baby boomers a day](#) are becoming eligible for the program.

With that in mind, CNSNews.com asked Gingrich at a March 18 press conference: “You were a prominent supporter of the Medicare prescription drug plan that President Bush signed into law in 2003. The Medicare trustees now say that plan is \$7.2 trillion in unfunded liabilities over the next 75 years. Do you regret your support for the plan looking back?”

One might think that \$7.2 trillion figure would give the likely Republican presidential candidate pause. Gingrich, however, replied with an unqualified “No.” He added, “I am for dramatic reform of Medicare,” patting himself on the back for having “saved it in 1996” by passing “changes which enabled [the trustees] to say that we had postponed any problem for well over a decade.” Note that he did *not* say



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that his alleged salvation of the program put it on a permanently sound footing but merely that it staved off the inevitable collapse for more than 10 years (i.e., when it would be someone else's problem).

Note, too, that the supposed conservative is not for abolishing this unconstitutional program but for "reforming" and "modernizing" it, as he later explained: "And for us to have a government-run health plan that said we're not going to help you with insulin but we'll be glad to pay for kidney dialysis is an utterly anti-human provision. And so all I was in favor of was modernizing the system to recognize modern medicine." Gingrich admits that Medicare is socialized medicine and seems to have no problem with that. It just needs, he said, "the right application of modern medicine for the right prevention, the right wellness and the right management of chronic conditions." Of course, in a government-run health plan, guess who decides what is the "right" way to treat a patient. Hint: It's neither the patient nor his doctor.

Gingrich seems to take the same approach to other federal healthcare programs. At the same, event he criticized ObamaCare not for its fundamental immorality or unconstitutionality but for its "form," [according to FoxNews.com](#). "Gingrich pointed to an 18-foot-long list of the new government offices created by the law as an example of some of the 'financially unsustainable,' 'utterly unworkable,' and 'extraordinarily expensive' provisions it contains." He faulted the Obama administration for "stonewalling serious rethinking of" the law. These are all valid criticisms, but they imply that if the administration could come up with a seemingly workable healthcare plan, Gingrich would favor it. Indeed, his own suggested "fundamental replacement of ObamaCare" amounts to giving Medicaid funds to states in the form of block grants — reformed, not repealed, socialized medicine.

The Gingrich approach to the welfare state is, in other words, the neoconservative approach to it. Neocon godfather Irving Kristol described it thus in a 2003 [article](#) called "The Neoconservative Persuasion": "Neocons do not like the concentration of services in the welfare state and are happy to study alternative ways of delivering these services. But they are impatient with the Hayekian notion that we are on 'the road to serfdom.' Neocons do not feel that kind of alarm or anxiety about the growth of the state in the past century, seeing it as natural, indeed inevitable." With his emphasis on reform rather than repeal of the welfare state, Gingrich is squarely within the disastrous neocon tradition.

Photo of Newt Gingrich: AP Images

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