



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on April 27, 2011

GOP Faces Tough Audiences in Pitching Medicare Overhaul

For example, one Republican lawmaker at a town hall meeting in central Florida was forced to field accusations from irate Americans that he and his colleagues were dismantling Medicare in order to provide tax cuts to the wealthy.

Also in Florida, Representative Daniel Webster (R-Fla.) was confronted by a boisterous crowd at a town hall meeting in Orlando. The audience seemed to be organized, bearing signs that read, “Hands Off Medicare” and “Tax the Rich.”

Webster responded to the crowd by assuring them that the proposed changes would not affect current retirees. “Not one senior citizen is harmed by this budget,” he declared, adding that without significant spending reforms, his granddaughter was “looking at a bankrupt country.”



Likewise, Rep. Ryan himself faced an angry audience in Wisconsin, when he attempted to explain the GOP’s rationale for changing Medicare. Despite his best efforts, the truculent crowd repeatedly booed and hurled caustic retorts at him.

On Tuesday evening, Representative Allen West addressed a similarly chaotic audience at a church theater. As the audience heckled and jumped to their feet, some members came to West’s defense. The crowd’s belligerence was so blatant that West felt compelled to declare, “You’re not going to intimidate me!”

Republicans have spent the past 10 days attempting to sell the American people on their plan to overhaul Medicare, which would still allow seniors to receive a fixed subsidy from the government to help pay for premiums, but payments for healthcare services would come from a private health insurance plan of their choosing. Since Medicare would send the subsidies to the private plans, companies would be forced to compete against one another. While the proposal does force seniors to pay more for smaller expenses, it caps what can be paid out of pocket, setting a flat \$600 deductible and the cap at \$6,000.

The *New York Times* writes of the measure:

Under the Republican proposal, Medicare would be converted into a program that would subsidize health coverage for retirees rather than provide coverage directly, a change that many Democrats say would risk leaving the elderly with inadequate health care as costs rise over the long run. The Republican budget would also transform Medicaid, which pays for nursing homes for low-income residents, into a grant program to states, raising the possibility that states, under



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budget pressure, would cut back on coverage.

The Democrats have successfully mobilized a campaign against the Republican budget and Medicare proposal, which includes phone calls, radio and television ads, and protests.

The fierce opposition by Democrats to the plan is somewhat confusing, however. Fox News [explains](#) that the framework of Ryan's Medicare proposal "bares [sic] similarities to the exchanges in the federal healthcare overhaul."

Regardless of the reactions of voters at town hall meetings, however, Republicans remain confident that the American people will come around. Ryan told his colleagues that he has been successful at least in making the case that Medicare will be bankrupt without intervention.

Meanwhile, Republicans have responded to the Democratic opposition by attempting to change the conversation from Medicare to federal spending. Unfortunately, such a strategy does not help the GOP, as the Republican budget proposal is [not much better](#) than Obama's proposed budget and will reportedly add \$5 trillion to the national debt over the next 10 years, an improvement perhaps from Obama's budget which would add \$9.5 trillion to the debt, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

As far as voter frustration, some Republicans contend that the angry crowds at town hall meetings are not representational of the general reaction of the American people to the proposal. Pennsylvania's Republican Representative Lou Barletta said, "My town halls are being disrupted by Democrats. They are apparently being sent to us to do just that. I am not sensing the general public is angered over Medicare reform. When I explain that people over 55 are not affected there is almost a sigh of relief."



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