



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on August 13, 2012

Romney Keeps Distance From Ryan Budget Plan

Even as he campaigned with his designated running mate over the weekend, Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney was careful to avoid embracing as his own the controversial budget Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wisc.) steered through the House of Representatives this year. The spending plan, which died in the Senate, has come under fire from the Obama campaign over projected spending reductions in entitlement programs and a restructuring of the Medicare program that would allow future retirees to opt out of the program and choose a private savings plan instead. In a joint appearance with Ryan on [60 Minutes](#), Romney was asked by Bob Schieffer of CBS News if his choice of a vice presidential candidate had effectively shifted the focus of the campaign debate from President Obama's handling of the economy to the Ryan budget.



Schieffer: There's no question your campaign has been trying to make this election a referendum on Barack Obama. Now, some people are saying you are making it a referendum on Paul Ryan's budget plan.

Romney: Well, I have my budget plan, as you know, that I've put out. And that's the budget plan that we're going to run on. At the same time, we have the record of President Obama. If people think, by the way, that their utility bill has gone down, they should vote for him. If they think jobs are more plentiful, they should vote for him.

A CNN political [blog](#) published what reporter Peter Hamby described as an internal "talking points" memo from the Romney campaign that was released to CNN by "a Republican source." The memo, written in Q&A format, contains several suggestions for deflecting questions about Romney's attachment to the Ryan budget, including this one:

Does this mean Mitt Romney is adopting the Paul Ryan plan?

Gov. Romney applauds Paul Ryan for going in the right direction with his budget, and as president he will be putting together his own plan for cutting the deficit and putting the budget on a path to balance.

Romney's administration will go through the budget line by line and ask two questions: Can we afford it? And, if not, should we borrow money from China to pay for it?

Left unmentioned is whether there is constitutional authority for the various spending programs that a Romney administration would be examining. Another of the talking points deals directly with the



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Medicare issue.

Do you worry that Paul Ryan's controversial Medicare plan will hurt the campaign with independents?

No. President Obama is the one who should be worried, because he has cut \$700 BILLION from Medicare to pay for Obamacare, and put in place a panel of Washington bureaucrats to make decisions about what kind of care seniors will receive under Medicare. Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan have a bipartisan plan to strengthen Medicare by giving future seniors the choice between traditional Medicare and a variety of private plans. They are committed to ensuring that Medicare remains strong, not just for today's seniors, but for tomorrow's seniors as well.

But if Republicans succeed in restoring that \$700 billion to Medicare, what will that do to the savings Romney claims will be achieved by eliminating ObamaCare?

The Obama team is already attacking the Romney-Ryan budget in what is likely to be a major theme of the fall campaign. During the primary season, Romney, while not formally endorsing the plan, called the [Ryan budget](#) a "bold and exciting effort" that was "very much needed." Yet the plan would actually increase spending above current levels, since what are described as cuts are, in fact, smaller increases than under previous budget projections and smaller than the increases in Obama's budget plan. Based on optimistic projections of economic growth, the Ryan plan would eventually balance the budget — by 2040, according to estimate of the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office.

And what of the budget plan Romney published earlier this year? Josh Boak of the [The Fiscal Times](#) last week counted up Romney's proposed spending cuts and found "they fall short of his own target of \$500 billion a year in needed cutbacks" in what Romney expects will be his "first term" in the White House. Romney's projected savings include:

- Repealing ObamaCare (\$95 billion)

- Privatizing Amtrak (\$1.6 billion)

- Trimming foreign aid (\$100 million)

- Reductions for PBS and the arts (\$600 million)

- Eliminating funding for family planning funding, most of which goes to Planned Parenthood (\$300 million)

Romney also anticipates a \$60-billion savings by eliminating "government waste" and another \$62 billion by pay cuts for government employees and contractors and by not replacing workers who leave federal employment. Should all that come to pass, and another \$100 billion is saved, as Romney predicts, by turning Medicaid and job training programs into block grants to the states, that still adds up to \$380 billion, Boak noted, or \$180 billion a year shy of the candidate's stated goal. And that does not account for the increased military spending Romney favors or the spending reductions needed merely to offset the 20 percent reduction in tax rates he has proposed. Romney's budget figures include an optimistic annual growth rate of four percent a year for an economy that was limping along at 1.5 percent for the second quarter of 2012.

With our national debt now nearing \$16 trillion, proposals to merely trim, rather than eliminate, federal programs such as foreign aid and support for the arts suggest a willingness to continue the ride to a fiscal train wreck, albeit at a slightly slower speed. There is no authority under our Constitution for the federal government to be a dispenser of foreign aid or patron of the arts. Turning Medicaid and job



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training programs into block grants may give the states more discretion in how that money is spent, but it would still involve the federal government in activities that exceed its constitutional powers. It would be business as usual in a government that became bloated and debt-ridden by ignoring limits on its power and involving itself in virtually every aspect of American life.

During this year's primary campaign the non-partisan Committee For a Responsible Federal Budget released a preliminary [analysis](#) of the Republican candidates' budget plans. It found Romney's plan would add \$2.6 trillion to the nation's debt over the next 10 years, while former Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania would add \$5.4 trillion. Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich topped the list with a whopping \$7 trillion in additional debt. The only plan that would reduce the debt, the committee found, was Texas Congressman Ron Paul's, which would lower the debt by \$2.2 trillion. Not coincidentally, Paul proposed eliminating five [departments](#) of the federal government: Education, Energy, Commerce, Housing and Urban Development, and Interior.

Whatever else one might think of it, that is a bold plan. Could a President Paul get all that through Congress? Probably not, but then the same could be said of the far more timid plans advanced by Romney and Ryan.

Photo of Mitt Romney and running mate Paul Ryan: AP Images



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