



Santorum: Voting for Medicare Drug Program Was a Mistake

Now that he is considering running for President at a time when the federal government's financial condition is precarious indeed, former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum says that his 2003 vote in favor of Medicare prescription drug coverage was a mistake. Yet the reasoning behind his admission reveals his lack of commitment to both conservative principles and the Constitution.



Appearing on *Fox News Sunday*, the Republican Santorum listed two things about the bill that he thought made it a bad bill. Santorum said Congress should not have made the program universal and should have found a mechanism with which to pay for it, [according to FoxNews.com](#). He noted that he was against making the program universal at the time, but we lost. He said he voted for the program for reasons other than the drug benefit, like Medicare Advantage, but suggested he should have voted against the bill anyway.

Indeed he should. The program is now bleeding red ink to the tune of \$60 billion a year, and the Medicare trustees have estimated that it amounts to a \$7.2 trillion unfunded liability over the next 75 years. That Congress thought the government could cover every senior citizen without even considering where the money would come from at a time when the government was already trillions of dollars in the hole suggests that politicians (mostly Republicans) believed they could buy votes in the next election and let a future Congress clean up the mess theyd created. That the George W. Bush administration, meanwhile, saw fit to [threaten](#) Medicare actuary Richard S. Foster with termination for revealing his estimate of the programs cost much higher than the administrations estimate prior to the vote on the bill suggests that Bush was well aware that the drug benefit was a budget buster but, like Congress, preferred his own short-term electoral success to the countrys long-term fiscal solvency.

Aside from the programs fiscal irresponsibility, however, there were good, principled reasons to oppose it from the start. First and foremost, like the rest of Medicare, the drug benefit is unconstitutional; the federal government is not empowered to be involved in the provision of healthcare. Second, it is a socialist wealth redistribution program; it taxes some to subsidize the purchase of prescription drugs by others.

Santorum, writes FoxNews.com, sought to explain his record on Medicare as he talked up a new plan by Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) that would, over time, provide seniors with subsidized private insurance as



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opposed to Medicare checks sent directly to doctors. Ryans plan, while possibly something of an improvement over the existing Medicare system, is still ultimately [an unconstitutional, socialist approach](#).

Unconstitutional, socialist programs should be anathema to genuine conservatives, yet Santorums explanation of why he shouldnt have voted for Medicare drug coverage and his support for Ryans plan indicates that his beef isnt with the program *per se* but simply with some of its details. The fact that he voted for it because it provided for other Medicare programs is further proof that his expression of regret is not evidence of newfound principle but merely a tactic, as FoxNews.com put it, to bolster his fiscal credentials in anticipation of a run for the presidency. If the program were not running up enormous deficits, it is doubtful that Santorum would be casting aspersions on his initial support for it. In fact, it is quite likely that he would be bragging of his vote for the program, as [he did](#) when he ran for reelection to the Senate (and lost) in 2006.

Another reason Santorum may have decided to express regret for his vote is to draw a contrast between himself and another likely GOP presidential contender, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich. Gingrich, one of the biggest boosters of the Medicare drug program at the time of its inception, recently [said](#) that he has no regrets about his support of the program. Having seen the (well-deserved) flak Gingrich took for that remark, Santorum probably thinks that staking out an opposing position is the politically astute thing to do.

The problem, of course, is that is all politics and no principle. Then again, what else would one expect from a man who in 2008 offered up [this knee-slapper](#): If youre a Republican, if youre a Republican in the broadest sense, there is only one place to go right now and thats Mitt Romney?



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