

Seniors voice opposition to Medicare cuts

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.
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A group of seniors stood with several DFL leaders to tell Republicans, "Don't touch my Medicare."

US Reps. Betty McCollum (MN-4), and Keith Ellison (MN-5) and DFL congressional candidates Mike Obermueller and Brian Barnes gathered at the State Capitol with a group of seniors to voice their opposition against the Republican and vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan's proposed budget. The group said the Republican budget and presidential candidate Mitt Romney's promise to repeal the Affordable Care Act, now commonly known as Obamacare, would be devastating to seniors who depend on Medicare.

McCollum said the gathering at the Capitol was needed to combat rumors and negative ads claiming the House Democrats plan to gut Medicare to pay for Obamacare. A Democratic House report concludes that over 60,000 Minnesota seniors will pay higher drug costs under the Republican plan to repeal Obamacare and reopen the prescription drug donut-hole. The so-called donut-hole occurs when Medicare recipients exhaust the amount Medicare pays for senior's prescriptions. According to the report, seniors will pay more than \$550 million in higher drug costs over the next decade if Republicans repeal the Affordable Care Act. The report also shows that more than 750,000 Minnesota seniors will lose the free preventative care benefits that they now have under Obamacare.

"Democrats voted to strengthen Medicare in 2010 with our vote for Obamacare," said McCollum. "And I like the name Obamacare because President Obama does care."

McCollum said in her district alone nearly 7,000 seniors would be negatively affected by the Republican budget plan.

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Ellison said when it comes to Medicare, a lot of numbers are thrown around, but only one number is truly important.

"That number is one," said Ellison. "We're talking about the life of one senior who will be affected by our policies. This is about how we are going to treat the people who cleared a path for the rest of us. The Republican Ryan budget is scary to me and scary to seniors."

John Martin, a member of the DFL senior caucus, said the Republican budget, authored by Ryan – which proposes turning Medicare into a premium-support or voucher plan – would hurt him directly.

"The big thing that concerns me is the donut-hole that would reopen," said Martin. "I take a lot of medicines and I was going into the donut-hole in August."

Martin said his out-of-pocket costs for his prescription drugs was in the neighborhood of \$1,000 a year.

When asked if those proposing changes to programs such as Medicare and Medicaid understood the ramifications of their actions, Ellison said some legislators in the Republican Party are practicing Social Darwinism.

"They get it, I think they don't care," said Ellison. "They tend to think the people who should have, have – people who don't, don't. They kind of think if you help low-income, poor people it will just breed more low-income poor people. This is no way to deal with poverty in this country."