



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on May 27, 2011

Reid: No Change to “Medicare as We Know It”

Medicare presents an enormous unfunded liability — \$24.6 trillion, according to its trustees — to the U.S. government and, by extension, to U.S. taxpayers, who will have to pony up their hard-earned income to pay for the government’s promises of free healthcare for senior citizens. A reasonable person might give serious consideration to radically altering, if not abolishing, the program to reduce its long-term, clearly unsustainable cost.



In the world of politics, however, that which is reasonable frequently loses out to that which is perceived as politically advantageous. Thus, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.), when asked what he would do to shore up Medicare — the question of abolishing it was not even raised — stated emphatically that he is “not in favor of changing Medicare as we know it.”

During a May 24 press conference, [CNSNews.com](#) asked Reid, “According to the Medicare trustees, Medicare’s got \$24.6 trillion in unfunded liabilities. How many of those trillions in unfunded liabilities are you willing to cut to bring the program into solvency?”

Reid replied, “As we speak, as I indicated what we did with the healthcare bill, I think that was a tremendous step in the right direction, a half-a-trillion dollars — but we are not, in all the programs that we’re talking about, we’re not in favor of changing Medicare as we know it.”

The alleged Medicare savings from ObamaCare to which Reid referred, which are supposed to come from reductions in hospital payments and physician fees, are “substantial, but very uncertain,” [according to the 2011 Medicare trustees’ report](#). Congress has repeatedly blocked cuts in physician fees, and the cuts in hospital payments are predicated on increased hospital efficiency that may or may not materialize. “For these reasons,” the trustees wrote, “it is important to note that the actual future costs for Medicare are likely to exceed those shown by the current-law projections in this report.”

In other words, ObamaCare is probably not going to reduce the cost of Medicare. Meanwhile, Reid is opposed to altering the program in any fundamental sense, leaving taxpayers on the hook for \$24.6 trillion between now and 2085. Add to that the existing \$14.3 trillion in debt (with more likely to come) and the unfunded liabilities of Medicaid, Social Security, and other unconstitutional, socialist programs, and taxpayers can look forward to the day when those [gag 1040 forms](#) that say, “How much money did you make last year? Send it in,” become reality.

Reid undoubtedly believes it would be political suicide to suggest changing “Medicare as we know it,” an opinion likely bolstered by the recent victory of Democrat Kathy Hochul in a special election for a



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New York congressional seat, which Democrats and their allies in the media are [spinning](#) as a defeat for Rep. Paul Ryan's (R-Wis.) Medicare reform plan.

At the same time, he does seem to believe genuinely in the program itself. Explaining why he opposes changing Medicare, Reid told CNSNews.com:

We have a responsibility to take care of our senior citizens. I've told some of you this before; I'll repeat it again: My first elective job was on a large hospital district in the state of Nevada. When I was elected to that body we had no Medicare, and so 40 percent or more of the people that came into that hospital who were seniors had to have somebody sign for their bill. And if they did not pay it, we would go after them [with] the collection department. While I was on that board, Medicare came into being and Medicare, while an imperfect plan, now allows people who are seniors who are sick to go into a hospital. That's what it's all about.

What Reid fails to recognize is that seniors are still having others foot their medical bills for them, but now those people are doing so under the threat of a much more powerful collection agency — the Internal Revenue Service. Medicare did not resolve the problem; it merely masked it and amplified it, forcing some people to pay for others' healthcare and causing those on the receiving end to feel entitled to the fruits of others' labor. Continuing such a program is not only fiscally irresponsible but also morally indefensible.

As long as attitudes such as Reid's prevail in Washington, the problem of Medicare's insolvency — and the dire long-term prospects for the federal government and the U.S. economy — will never be resolved. The United States will then go the way of Greece, Portugal, and Ireland. But who will bail *us* out?



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