



August 25, 2009 - Topic: Health Care Reform

## Republican National Committee Unveils Health Care Bill of Rights

On Monday, the Republican National Committee unveiled what it called a "**Seniors' Health Care Bill of Rights**" that aims to address growing concerns among seniors over the potential effect of current health reform proposals on Medicare, the *Washington Post* reports.

According to the *Post*, the document does not include any actual proposals for reform but instead lists things the GOP thinks "reform should not do" (Pershing, *Washington Post*, 8/25).

The document promises seniors that Republicans will "protect Medicare" and suggests that Democrats are "promoting a government-run health care experiment that will cut over \$500 billion from Medicare."

A proposal in the House reform bill (**HR 3200**) would reduce Medicare and Medicaid spending by \$500 billion over a decade by limiting payment increases to physicians and hospitals (Seelye, "**Prescriptions**," *New York Times*, 8/24).

The document also calls for:

- Preserving the doctor-patient relationship;
- Prohibiting rationing of care; and
- Preventing interference in end-of-life decisions.

It also advocates guaranteeing that seniors will be able to keep their existing coverage and protection of veterans' health care programs (*Boston Globe*, 8/25).

Katie Wright, a spokesperson for the RNC, said that Republicans are committed to controlling Medicare costs but that the "money shouldn't be taken from Medicare to fund a new entitlement."

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the bill of rights "marks a remarkable turnaround" for the GOP, which has a history of attempting to cut funds from Medicare (King, *Wall Street Journal*, 8/25).

### Steele Touts 'Bill of Rights' in *Post* Op-Ed

In a *Post* opinion piece that unveiled the bill of rights, RNC Chair Michael Steele wrote, "While Republicans believe that reforms are necessary, President Obama's plan for a government-run health care system is the wrong prescription," adding that "under the Democrats' plan, senior citizens will pay a steeper price and will have their treatment options reduced or rationed."

Steele wrote, "We also believe that any health care reform should be fully paid for, but not funded on the backs of our nation's senior citizens."

According to Steele, Obama can "honor his [campaign] pledges for bipartisan health care reform" by "[r]eversing course and joining Republicans," adding that "support of health care for our nation's senior citizens is a good place to start." He concluded, "Doing so will help him restart the reform process to give Americans access to low-cost, high-quality health care" (Steele, *Washington Post*, 8/24).

### Democrats Respond to Proposal

Officials from the Democratic National Committee responded to the RNC's bill of rights by noting that curren

health reform plans would help seniors by lowering costs and bridging the so-called doughnut hole in the Medicare prescription drug benefit.

DNC spokesperson Brad Woodhouse said, "It should be no surprise that the Republican Party -- which whipped many Americans into a frenzy at town-hall meetings on health care this month by spreading one lie about reform after another -- has now taken to scaring seniors who have nothing to fear and much to gain from reform" (*Boston Globe*, 8/25).

In a media conference call organized by the DNC on Monday, Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.) said Steele's opinion piece was "just simply riddled with lies, and we need to call him out on that." She said, "The Republicans are doing nothing but saying 'no' and spreading lies," adding, "Fear is their friend" (Allen, *The Hill*, 8/24).

Democratic officials also alleged that Steele was only pretending to be interested in Medicare, noting that in 2006 he said that cuts to the program should be "on the table" ("Prescriptions," *New York Times*, 8/24).

### **AARP Response**

Officials from AARP said that they welcomed the RNC's pledge to protect Medicare but dismissed the bill of rights as misleading and exaggerated (*Wall Street Journal*, 8/25).

On Monday, AARP **released a statement** that said no provisions in current health reform proposals "would bring about the scenarios the RNC is concerned about" (Colliver, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8/25).

John Rother, executive vice president of AARP, said, "Change by itself is anxiety producing, but as we have analyzed the various bills (before Congress), the proposed Medicare savings do not limit benefits, they do not impose rationing and they do not put the government between patients and their doctors" (*Wall Street Journal*, 8/25).

### **Broadcast Coverage**

MSNBC's "**The Rachel Maddow Show**" on Monday reported on the release of the RNC's bill of rights (Stewart [1], "The Rachel Maddow Show," MSNBC, 8/24). Monday's show also included a segment on the GOP's messages during the reform debate (Stewart [2], "**The Rachel Maddow Show**," MSNBC, 8/24).