

My colleague, Congressman Paul Ryan, has been getting some buzz lately with his "Roadmap" -- a prescription for what Republicans should do if they regain control of Congress.

I applaud Ryan for being candid about Republican plans, which he would play a critical role in shaping as the likely chairman of the House Budget Committee. It is unfortunate that many of his fellow Republicans have been less willing to give specifics about what they would do.

It isn't just that Republicans have been keeping their heads down: the "Ryan Roadmap" simply has not been subjected to enough critical analysis. In particular, three troubling items deserve more attention.

First, for all of the Republican talk about deficits, Ryan's plan would increase the deficit dramatically over the next 10 years. Independent analysis from the Tax Policy Center shows that his revenue proposals would mean \$5 trillion -- yes, trillion -- in added debt. For comparison, take the total combined cost of the stimulus package, the Troubled Asset Relief Program and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and then double it.

Second, while Republicans are attacking Democrats for reforming Medicare and reducing deficits, Ryan would save money by simply cutting everyone under 55 from Medicare entirely. Instead, older Americans would be given a voucher worth less than what they have been receiving from Medicare to buy private insurance. This plan is a throwback to the disastrous 1997 Balanced Budget Amendment, which created an artificial formula to cut Medicare costs. The result was chaos for doctors and not one dime was saved.

Third, and most bizarre of all, is Ryan's proposal for two separate tax systems: a new, streamlined process with lower taxes for the wealthy, and today's same Byzantine system for the rest of us, including an alternative minimum tax that threatens millions of more families every year because it is not indexed to inflation.

Yet despite what Ryan would have you believe, there is a path that -- while not easy -- can improve efficiency and earn broad support from Americans. What would such a program look like?

To begin, don't delay or repeal health care reform -- accelerate it. Medicare cost increases are the biggest source of future deficits. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office determined that the health care reform bill will reduce the deficit by \$138 billion by 2019. In Oregon, we're showing how Medicare can provide better care for less money. It is far better to reform this critical program than merely slash health care funding for Americans under 55, as Ryan would do.

Next, don't extend unaffordable tax cuts that will increase the deficit (and increase our

borrowing from the Chinese). Instead, we should scale back or eliminate some "tax expenditures" -- the exemptions and deductions in the tax code that reduce revenue by 44 percent. This would allow collecting the same or more revenue with much lower tax rates. If we really have a trillion dollars or more of tax revenue to forgo, we should reform or eliminate the alternative minimum tax, protecting 33 million middle-income families who face the tax next year. There will be less confusion and evasion for businesses and individuals, who will also avoid the added costs of tax complexity. This is the approach that President Ronald Reagan and bipartisan congressional leadership took in 1986, and it is time to do it again.

Next, we should address Social Security's long-term deficit. The path is simple: Sometime this century, there will be a combination of small adjustments to raise revenues, modify some benefits, or both. The sooner it happens, the smaller and less painful the changes will be. Let's do it now to minimize the impact and show how Republicans and Democrats can work together.

Finally, we must get serious about cutting spending. After Medicare, the biggest source of future deficits is the military, which is growing every year, faster than the rate of inflation. There is bipartisan support to reduce wasteful programs like the unnecessary alternative engine for the joint strike fighter, and for reducing overseas troops. Why are we spending billions defending Germany from the Soviet Union when the Cold War ended 20 years ago? Similarly, a reformed farm bill would save money and help Oregon farmers and ranchers protect the environment while competing in the global marketplace.

These aren't pipe dreams or political statements. We can improve health care, fix a flawed tax system and save billions in spending. Special interests in Washington, D.C., may holler, but the people will cheer.

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