

Congressman Blumenauer, a member of the House Budget Committee, questioned Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius during a hearing discussing the programs enacted in the Affordable Care Act.

In addition to by helping more children get health coverage, ending lifetime and most annual limits on care, allowing young adults under 26 to stay on their parent's health insurance, and giving patients access to recommended preventive services without cost, the Affordable Care Act also saves taxpayer money by slowing the growth in healthcare costs. One of the innovations created in the law is the Independent Payment Advisory Board, which is designed to help Congress find policies that will continue to reduce the cost of healthcare, without affecting the value of care received by beneficiaries.

In response to questioning from Congressman Blumenauer, Secretary Sebelius clarified several important points about the Independent Payment Advisory Board, which the Secretary termed, "a backstop mechanism to ensure Medicare remains solvent for years to come." The Board is made up of 15 health experts, including health care providers, patient advocates, employers, and experts in health economics who will evaluate policies that save cost without reducing care for beneficiaries. The Board cannot make recommendations that ration care, raise beneficiary premiums or cost-sharing, reduce benefits, or change eligibility for Medicare. It also cannot eliminate benefits or decide what care Medicare beneficiaries can receive. Members of the Board have strict conflict of interest rules and cannot have any other job while they serve on the Board.

At the hearing, several Republican Congressmen expressed concerns about the Board, and offered instead the plan offered in the Republican budget. The Republican plan, as has been repeatedly demonstrated, would result in Medicare denying treatment for some services, people losing coverage, and in costs going up. Under the Republican plan, most Medicare beneficiaries would be forced to buy private insurance, helped only by a modest government subsidy insufficient to cover the costs of healthcare. In response, Blumenauer noted that denials of coverage are common in the private healthcare sector. "I'm concerned that [Republicans] are talking about a fantasy world where insurance companies don't make decisions denying benefits, don't ration care, don't cut people off."