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Medicare and the Real Trap the President Has Set

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Distinctly Catholic

Congressman Paul Ryan has charged, with some accuracy, that the President "abdicated" his responsibility to lead the nation towards confronting its long-term fiscal mess by presenting a budget that does not address entitlement reform. Ryan has promised that the GOP will tackle Medicare and Medicaid in its budget proposals.

Ryan gets high marks for courage and the White House is counting on the fact that Americans will recoil from the kinds of proposals likely to emanate from the GOP. Americans like Medicare a lot and they are wary of the kinds of privatization schemes like to be forthcoming from Ryan. The Democrats are hoping that by touching the third rail, Ryan will get burned, but the posture of the White House is hardly a profile in courage. The long-term debt problem will not go away.

But, maybe the President is smarter than we think. Maybe he hopes that by defending Medicare and Medicaid he can recast the Democrats in their historic role as defenders of the middle and working classes who count on those programs. Even more, perhaps he is counting on the fact that, once the GOP has presented his proposals, he will come forward with a different, less draconian approach, one that does not take Medicare away from the elderly, but requires the wealthy in America to pay their fair share of taxes.

Maybe the President will say: The GOP wants to eliminate Medicare, turn it into a voucher program, but I want to return taxes on the super-rich to where they were when Ronald Reagan left office and use all of that money to shore up Medicare. The President could one up the Republicans, who have said they will not be addressing Social Security reform, and remove the cap on FICA taxes to strengthen that program.

If the American people have a choice in 2012 between a party that wants to keep the government's promise to its citizens that they will have health care in their twilight years by raising taxes on rich people and a party that wants to eviscerate that promise to the elderly so that they can continue giving massive

tax cuts to the super-rich, I think the first party wins.

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