

Unbalanced budget - In our view

Paul Ryan did the expected last week. The Wisconsin Republican congressman produced a budget plan that would force the poor to find another country in which to live.

It would reduce Medicare and Medicaid funding. It would repeal the federal healthcare law. It would eliminate mortgage lenders Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae, thus placing homeownership beyond the grasp of many Americans.

Ryan says this is the bitter medicine America needs to avoid a national bankruptcy.

But Ryan's budget proposal, which does, in fact, have some good ideas, is a starve-the-government plan.

Like most budgets prepared by the opposition -- be it Republicans when Democrats occupy the White House or Democrats when Republicans hold the office -- this budget is a political narrative, not a workable solution.

It criticizes the Obama budget but offers no pathway to get from where we are to where we need to go.

It raises the stakes for the most vulnerable while cutting taxes for those in the highest tax brackets.

It would cut federal tax rates from the current six tax rates to just two -- 25 percent for the wealthiest and 10 percent for others. No matter that some of those who make billions would pay 28 percent less in taxes while those just above the poverty level would now have to pay federal taxes. It also would lower the corporate tax rate from 35 percent to 25 percent.

All of this, he notes, is contingent upon the House Ways and Means Committee deciding which taxes stay and which ones go.

It would increase military spending by \$554 billion on the backs of those who rely on domestic programs to meet their everyday needs.

The Ryan budget talks about the medicine the nation needs to swallow. But it avoids the across-the-board suggestions offered by the Simpson-Bowles debt-reduction commission that would hit everyone at every economic level.

There are some suggestions in the Ryan budget worth considering. For example, giving states Medicaid block grants to meet their specific needs rather than continue the existing program with its various mandates, is gaining acceptance not only among Republicans from Mitt Romney to Tom Corbett, but among some stakeholder groups as well. The key is to maintain funding levels, not cut them over time.

And Ryan is right to note the nation's mounting debt. But this is not a responsible budget. You do not cut programs that Americans rely on and cut taxes for those who can afford to pay and call the budget "balanced."

The Simpson-Bowles debt reduction plan was not well-received, but it was a plan, as former Sen. Alan Simpson said, in which "everyone has skin in the game."

The Ryan budget allows the well-heeled to avoid having to share that sacrifice.

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