
Greenstein: House Budget Committee 2019 Budget Continues Trend of Harsh, Deep Cuts

House Budget Committee Chairman Steve Womack's new 2019 budget shows that the House majority's fiscal priorities haven't changed. The budget plan maintains the costly 2017 tax cuts, while making deep cuts in health care and basic assistance for struggling families, repealing the Affordable Care Act (ACA), and severely cutting funding over time for investments that can boost the nation's productivity and thereby foster economic growth. The committee's materials show that the budget would make nearly \$6 trillion in cuts over ten years to entitlements and non-defense discretionary programs, including \$2.1 trillion in health care alone, including cuts to Medicaid, ACA premium tax credits, and Medicare. The budget incorporates the failed House ACA repeal bill, which, at the time the bill was considered, the Congressional Budget Office estimated would have taken away health coverage from 23 million Americans by 2026. (This estimate includes the effect of repealing the individual mandate, which Congress has since enacted.)

This budget, President Trump's 2019 budget, and recent congressional Republican budgets all share this same basic architecture. If implemented, they would increase the number of Americans who struggle to put food on the table, keep a roof over their heads, or afford college; widen income inequality; and leave millions more Americans without health coverage. This budget comes just months after Republican leaders pushed through a \$1.9 trillion tax cut that has substantially increased the deficit and showered tax-cut benefits on the most well-off, and the budget opens the door to further tax cuts that could cost still more. This agenda would widen the already-stark economic divisions in our society and leave more Americans behind.

Our nation faces serious fiscal challenges, with the aging of the baby boom generation and a growing list of unmet needs, from repairing decaying infrastructure to making child care more affordable for working families to addressing large shortages of affordable housing. Many supporters of this budget — which purports to reach balance in 2027, based in part on rosy economic assumptions — will claim the budget is evidence of their fiscal responsibility. But it's neither fiscally responsible nor politically courageous to increase deficits through tax cuts that largely benefit the most well-off and then call for massive cuts in most other parts of the budget including education, health care, assistance to low-income children and families, job training, environmental protection, and scientific research.

It's easy to become numb to the harshness of these budgets and to brush aside their policy implications based on the assumption (likely correct) that few, if any, of these policies will be enacted this year. But this budget reflects where many congressional leaders — and the President

— would like to take the country if they get the opportunity to enact these measures in the years ahead. Rather than help more families have a shot at the American dream, it asks the most from those who have the least, and it would leave our nation less prepared for the economic and other challenges that lie ahead.

#

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization and policy institute that conducts research and analysis on a range of government policies and programs. It is supported primarily by foundation grants.