

# Ryan unveils budget reform plan

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Calling increased federal spending the biggest threat to the nation's economy, Rep. Paul Ryan on Wednesday introduced a plan he said would keep key federal programs solvent, eliminate federal debt and increase business competitiveness abroad.

"This is not a short-term fix," Ryan said. "This is a fix for our long-term future because if we don't tackle these problems, they are going to tackle us."

The proposal, which he calls "A Roadmap For America's Future," includes measures to reform Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security and a simplified tax code.

The move comes as the Janesville Republican has been mentioned as a possible running mate for presumptive GOP presidential nominee Sen. John McCain of Arizona. Ryan's economic expertise, residence in a key swing state and youth -- he's 38 -- are seen as complements for McCain, 71, who has acknowledged shortcomings on economic issues.

Experts said Ryan's plan should help cement his reputation as a key GOP policymaker. But the plan will invite more controversy than McCain might want and likely won't help Ryan if McCain is seriously considering him as a running mate, some said.

"It's clearly aimed at getting attention and getting those issues out there for discussion," said David Canon, a UW-Madison political science professor. "But considering McCain has tiptoed around these issues so far, he probably doesn't want to talk about it."

Canon praised the plan for its comprehensiveness. "It's definitely a serious plan," he said.

## Spark a debate

Ryan, the highest-ranking Republican on the House budget committee and a member of the committee that writes laws governing taxes, Social Security and federal health programs, said the plan was 14 months in the making and isn't designed to get him attention from McCain.

Rather, he said, he wants to spark a debate about how to rein in federal spending while providing Medicaid and Medicare benefits, making sure everyone has access to health insurance, reforming the Social Security program and simplifying the tax code.

"Washington really is broken," Ryan said. "Nobody wants to make a bold proposal out of fear of being demagogued and attacked by the other party. What I'm simply trying to do here is get us out of gridlock and solve some of these problems. "

He said in The Wall Street Journal on Wednesday that Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and other government spending will consume 40 percent of the economy by 2040. "This will require more than doubling the average tax burden of the past 40 years just to keep the government afloat," he wrote. "Continuing down this path will eventually strangle our economy."

Ryan acknowledged the plan faces long odds in the Democratic-controlled Congress, and some Democrats who plan to challenge him in the fall election, panned the proposal.

Marge Krupp, a chemical engineer from Pleasant Prairie running against Ryan, said the plan benefits wealthy people, Wall Street and health-care companies at the expense of average people and seniors.

"He doesn't understand the pain of Wisconsin's working people and senior citizens," Krupp said.

Bill Hebert, campaign manager for Mike Hebert, a Kenosha factory worker who is also challenging Ryan, said he thought some parts of plan have merit, such as the proposal to revamp the tax code. But "it's too little too late. Where's he been for 10 years? "