

The Status quo is not an option

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If you are 30 years of age or younger, pay close attention.

If the federal government maintains the status quo in spending, it will virtually assure that just when you are in your peak earning years, around 2030, your taxes will be at least 33 percent higher than they are now.

That's just to maintain existing programs, without any new initiatives.

So much for your peak earnings.

So much for the lifestyle you expect.

And it gets worse for your children. A lot worse.

This is not a speculation. This is not about partisan politics.

This is math. Just add up the unfunded promises.

For too long Democrats and Republicans alike have been ignoring the fact that America will not have the money to keep paying the costs of its social insurance programs as the retiring baby boomers draw upon them.

Instead, Washington has piled on more spending while pushing the payments off to the future, where they accumulate like weights in an attic, waiting to crash down on future generations.

It's time to find a better way to run the government.

That's why U.S. Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., deserves support for proposing a sweeping reform of how the nation pays for Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security and health insurance. His plan also reforms federal income and corporate taxes.

Ryan understands the problem on both a national and a personal level. The 38-year-old Janesville native has three children. He sees a grim future for them, unless things change.

The specific elements of Ryan's plan may or may not be the right answers. But the plan's focus is exactly on target. It attacks the No. 1 national problem that almost no one else in Washington wants to confront -- the approaching fiscal calamity.

Ryan's plan, which he calls "A Roadmap to America's Future," provides an opportunity to start the confrontation.

But he will need help.

None of the presidential candidates -- Republican John McCain and Democrats Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton -- is yet facing the challenge. In fact, their campaign promises would make it worse.

All have offered plans that would add at least \$100 billion to the federal deficit. Their plans for offsetting added spending with cuts or more revenue are, to put it politely, nothing more than pipe dreams.

The presidential candidates, along with Ryan's colleagues in Congress, owe America a frank and detailed explanation of how they plan to answer the long-term fiscal challenges the nation faces.

American voters ought to demand it.

5 reasons for reform

1. In 11 years Medicare's trust fund that pays for hospital benefits will be empty.
2. Medicare and Social Security together over the next 75 years will fall \$40 trillion short of fulfilling the promises made. That's a burden of \$353,000 per household.
3. The clock is ticking. In five years, the unfunded liability in Medicare and Social Security climbs to \$54 trillion.
4. The United States spent \$235 billion to pay the annual interest on the federal debt in 2007. That was more than the federal government spent on Medicaid, farm subsidies and foreign aid combined.
5. Since 2001 the United States has been relying on foreigners to buy 80 percent of the country's new debt.