home patients, impoverished children, the permanently disabled, and the neediest in our society can afford basic care. In fact, two-thirds of all Medicaid spending goes to caring for older adults and people with disabilities. The cost of long-term care, like in rehabilitation centers and nursing homes, is prohibitive. Medicaid serves as a lifeline for these individuals. And it is not an expensive program. In fact, compared to private sector health care costs, Medicaid is cheap, growing half as fast.

The GOP plan cuts Medicaid when physicians and hospitals can barely afford to treat these patients because of such low reimbursement rates. It is no mystery why Medicaid is beginning to strain State and Federal budgets. With so many Americans out of work, enrollment in Medicaid has skyrocketed as more and more families come to rely upon this safety net.

I have said it before and I will say it again: Medicaid is not too expensive. People are too poor. That's why we should be focused on creating new jobs. One hundred days into this new Republican Congress and not a single jobs bill.

Madam Speaker, this plan is not a price that I'm willing to pay. We can do better. We will do better. America's seniors are watching.

FUTURE OF MEDICARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. KISSELL) for 4 minutes.

Mr. KISSELL. Madam Speaker, from the time that I first came to Congress, I have continued to be a strong supporter of our seniors' issues and standing by our seniors. Today, I rise in support of another issue that our seniors are facing today, the issue of the future of Medicare.

We must stand by those who have stood by us as they enter into their senior years, and we must be strong in making sure that Medicare stays as a solid medical safety net for our seniors.

Madam Speaker, we have heard a lot about the Greatest Generation, that generation that fought World War II and worked in industries and raised families and came back and did so much to make America the great Nation as we know today. But, Madam Speaker, America is a great Nation, has been for many years, and will be for many years to come. And there is not just one Greatest Generation; there is a continuum of great generations.

I grew up in a very small town in North Carolina, and my heroes were those people—many of whom had fought in World War II—those teachers and those storekeepers and those people in a small town that raised many of my friends and myself and looked after us, whether in the school or church or wherever it might be. As these people that took care of us become seniors and they continue this throughout the Nation for generations to come, we must take care of those that took care of us.

I was a high school history teacher for 7 years before coming to Congress, and I always told my students that you're not studying history by looking at pages in a book or looking at old pictures or paintings or whatever it might be; you are studying about people that have a story. As we talk today about our seniors and Medicare, we cannot forget that these are the people who took care of us. They cannot become just political bargaining chips and political theories. They are real people. They have real stories.

I want to talk briefly about two people that are especially important to me—my mom and dad. My dad grew up in that same small town that I did in North Carolina, fought in World War II, won a Bronze Star, came back, worked in the post office, and was happy just to be a part of helping in those ways that I talked about before. My mom grew up in Carroll County in Huntingdon, Tennessee, and came to North Carolina as a teacher and taught many generations. She is 96 years old, her birthday being last March 18. These are the heroes. These are the stories that we know, that all of us have. Whether our parents or grandparents, great-grandparents, aunts and uncles, whatever they may be, we cannot forget about them as individuals; we cannot forget about their stories, and we cannot let them become just political bargaining chips.

The question that we must ask, Madam Speaker, is: Why did we need Medicare in the first place? What in our system didn't work, that didn't take care of our seniors, that required Medicare to come into being? We know the answer to that. And we must continue to have that guarantee of a strong support structure when our medical needs for our seniors must be met this way. We must stand by our seniors.

□ 1030

REPUBLICAN 2012 BUDGET PLAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. MATSUI) for 4 minutes.

Ms. MATSUI. Madam Speaker, I rise today to voice my strong opposition to the Republican budget plan and its effects on America's seniors. I believe that we must address our national deficit, but I believe we can do it in a responsible manner that does not hinder our fragile economy and does not risk important programs.

I support the Democratic budget proposal, which makes practical cuts to reduce our Nation's deficit but without hurting America's seniors and sacrificing their health and financial security.

Madam Speaker, the Republican plan is irresponsible. It would hurt America's seniors while giving enormous tax breaks to the top 2 percent of the wealthiest Americans. It does nothing to create jobs but gives billions in corporate loopholes and subsidies to Big Oil. Most notably, the Republican plan would literally end Medicare. And while this may be a new plan, these are not new ideas.

The Republicans' 2012 budget attempts to do to Medicare what President Bush wanted to do to Social Security in 2005—privatize it and severely cut benefits. Madam Speaker, can you imagine if we had privatized Social Security in 2005 the way the Republicans wanted to do just before the biggest financial collapse since the Great Depression? Is that what we really want to do with Medicare? We cannot afford to have Wall Street control the fate of our seniors.

The Republican plan would convert Medicare into a voucher program that forces seniors to buy costly private insurance plans. It asks seniors, half of whom have less than $19,000 a year in total income, to pay more and get less. If this plan were put in place, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has estimated that the average senior would end up paying nearly three times more out-of-pocket expenses.

Meanwhile, the health care law enacted last year is already helping to close the gap in prescription drug coverage known as the doughnut hole and provides annual exams and preventive services. But a repeal of the health care law, as the Republican budget plan calls for, would eliminate these benefits. Madam Speaker, these benefits for Medicare patients are making a real difference in the lives of my constituents.

I recently heard from a 71-year-old woman from Sacramento who requires several expensive drugs to maintain her health. In October of 2010, she was worried about her ability to pay for her medication because she fell into the coverage gap. But she was relieved to learn that she would get $250 in 2010 and that 50 percent of her costs would be reimbursed this year and even more would be reimbursed in the future. But now Republicans want to pull the rug out from under our seniors and their families.

What is astonishing to me is that in addition to privatization of Medicare, the Republican plan also goes after Medicaid. Instead of making real reform to the Medicaid program, the Republican budget calls for converting Medicaid into a block grant program. That would sharply reduce funding for seniors and low-income Americans on Medicaid so that it would not keep up with health care costs.

Medicaid helps keep our seniors in their homes and helps them afford nursing homes if they need them, but the Republican plan would leave seniors on their own and ignores the promise that our country has made from one generation to another.

Madam Speaker, the Federal budget should reflect our American values that have been passed down for generations where seniors earn the benefits