



DNC runs false ad against Michele Bachmann, Erik Paulsen

By **Eric Black** | Published Thu, Sep 10 2009 1:08 pm

The Democratic National Committee is running an ad against Republicans in general, 10 Republicans in particular (including Minnesota Reps. Michele Bachmann and Erik Paulsen) alleging that they want to "end," "kill" and "abolish" Medicare.

The ad is beyond misleading. It's false.

Here's the version of the ad that specifically targets freshman Congressman Erik Paulsen of the suburban Twin Cities Third District.



The DNC claim is based on a proposal that was contained in the Republican alternative version of the federal budget earlier this year.

That Republican document includes a policy statement on Medicare. Although not all Republicans agree on this, it does say that, as a group, House Republicans would like to make a very major change in the way Medicare works for future generations of recipients. The plan would grandfather in those already on Medicare as well as those above currently 55 or older. The federal government would continue to pay directly for their health care expenses.

Abolish or Voucherize?

For the next generation, the Republican policy would change Medicare into a voucher program. Each senior citizen would get an annual amount, roughly equal to what Medicare would spend per senior, and they could use that voucher to buy insurance from a menu of government-approved private insurance companies. The amount each senior would receive would be adjusted to reflect their age, their health and their income so, presumably, the older, sicker, poorer seniors would get more.

Bachmann and Paulsen did vote for the Republican budget alternative, a 55-page document that covers a lot of topics. I have asked each of their

spokesters for clarification on whether they specifically support the voucher plan for Medicare and I have not heard.

This idea would be a very big and very controversial change in Medicare. I can imagine many arguments pro and con. But there is no reasonable way to flatly say that it is a proposal to "end," "kill" or "abolish" Medicare.

At a press call yesterday to promote the ads, DNC spokester Brad Woodhouse changed the language slightly, from the ad, saying that what Repubs favor would "abolish [Medicare] for all intents and purposes for younger Americans." But the "all intents and purposes" isn't enough to reconcile the Repub proposal with the word "abolish."

The DNC ad is also designed to create a general impression of Republicans as unfriendly to the interests of seniors in general and long-standing opponents of Medicare in particular. This is a more complicated argument. It's fair to say that the creation of Medicare was accomplished with mostly Dem votes in the overwhelmingly Dem Congress of 1965 and signed by Dem Pres. Lyndon Johnson and that many Republicans opposed its creation and invoked the "socialized medicine" scare language that many of their partisan heirs continue to employ this year.

But almost half of the Republicans in that 1965 Congress voted "aye," at least on final passage, for the bill that created Medicare.

Obama's more accurate version

Pres. Obama actually invoked a version of this whole tale, using much more defensible language, in his big speech last night. The context is the argument that his plan will make Medicare stronger and that some of those trying to scare seniors about what Obamacare will do to Medicare are not true defenders of Medicare. Note the difference between Obama's word choices and those in the ad:

"So don't pay attention to those scary stories about how your benefits will be cut, especially since some of the same folks who are spreading these tall tales have fought against Medicare in the past and just this year supported a budget that would essentially have turned Medicare into a privatized voucher program. That will not happen on my watch. I will protect Medicare."

I did ask DNC spokester Woodhouse how Bachmann and Paulsen came to be chosen as targets for the ad. He said that by voting for the budget proposal they had "cast their lot" with Sarah Palin. Palin had [an op-ed in yesterday's Wall Street Journal](#) that didn't refer to the Medicare voucher idea but did generally endorse some of the semi-privatized and voucherized health care financing ideas associated with the Cato Institute and other conservative think tanks.

Woodhouse said that Bachmann is aligned with Palinism generally and uses extreme rhetoric on health care issues. In Paulsen's case, he couldn't cite anything other than the vote for the Republican budget alternative and said that some of those on the list were there because:

"Some of these people would be deemed potentially vulnerable in the upcoming election and someone who ought to think twice when they cast a vote whether they ought to -- Erik Paulsen ought to think twice. Does he want to cast his lot with Sarah Palin."

The list of the 10 targets of the ad seems a combination of Repubs who are prominent, either on health care or in general, but are not deemed vulnerable (House Repub Leader JOhn Boehner of Ohio is on the list), and some who are clearly on the list because their seats are Dem targets for 2010. Bachmann probably qualifies on both scores. Paulsen, who has been a mostly quiet freshman, only on the vulnerable score.

Here's the text of the DNC ad (the one targeted Paulsen.) There's a generic version, in which no individual congressman is mentioned, and then there are nine other targeted versions with the names of specific Republican House members.

"Republicans want to end Medicare. You heard right: Erik Paulsen actually voted to abolish Medicare for future generations.

One of the most important programs for seniors. America's seniors have relied on Medicare for over 40 years, and Democrats are working to strengthen Medicare. But the plain truth is Republicans have opposed Medicare from the start. Their leaders have called for cutting Medicare, and now for killing it. Congressman Erik Paulsen: No friend of seniors.

The Democratic National Committee is responsible for the content of this advertising."

If you would like to read the Republican long-term Medicare proposal as they described it in their budget alternative, it's on page 23 of [this document](#) (which may take a minute to download).

The esteemed Factcheck.org did [a workup of the claims in the ad](#). Factcheck concluded that the basic claim that Republicans voted to abolish Medicare is "not true."

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