



NORTH STAR
OPINION RESEARCH

MEMORANDUM

To: Republican Senate Candidates and Operatives
From: Whit Ayres
Date: February 19, 2014
Subject: HHS Prescription Drug Mandate Hands GOP a 2014 Issue

A new report by respected former CBO economist Douglas Holtz-Eakin ([released by the American Action Forum](#)) shows that an obscure proposed Medicare regulation could offer surprising new ammunition for Republicans in this year's mid-term elections.

According to the report, the Department of Health and Human Services recently decreed that it will not allow most of the existing, low-premium plans in Medicare Part D to be offered again in 2015. That means [millions of seniors will be forced out of these popular plans into new, higher-premium plans during "open enrollment" in October](#) -- right before the mid-term elections. Seniors are likely to have fewer choices, stingier benefits, and higher costs.

This attempt to overhaul Medicare Part D offers big upsides to Republicans and big downsides for Democrats in 2014. Our polling shows that seniors are overwhelmingly satisfied with their current Part D drug benefit plans. They believe the plans cover the drugs they need, are convenient to use, and save them money.

Seniors are one of the most reliable voting groups in the electorate, and they have been trending Republican in recent elections. Seniors made up 16 percent of the 2012 electorate according to exit polls, and they voted for Mitt Romney over Barack Obama by 56 to 44 percent. Seniors usually make up a larger proportion of mid-term electorates. That was certainly the case in 2010 when they made up 23 percent of the electorate, and they supported Republican congressional candidates over Democrats by a 59 to 38 percent margin. By expanding the "if you like your plan you can keep it" debate beyond private insurance and into Medicare, this mandate will drive seniors even further into the GOP camp.

The following table shows the number of seniors whose Medicare Part D plans are threatened in six states with incumbent Democratic senators seeking reelection. All six voted for Obamacare. In all but one case, the number of threatened seniors is greater than the Democrat's margin of victory in 2008.

<u>Democratic Incumbent Running for Reelection</u>	<u>Seniors Whose Part D Plans are Threatened¹</u>	<u>Margin of Victory in 2008</u>
Mark Begich (Alaska)	15,334	3,953
David Pryor (Arkansas)	127,539	Uncontested
Mary Landrieu (Louisiana)	122,256	121,121
Al Franken (Minnesota)	126,151	312
Jeanne Shaheen (New Hampshire)	75,005	44,035
Kay Hagen (North Carolina)	417,943	361,801

Assuming Congress does not block this new regulation from being implemented this spring, it will create a golden opportunity for Republican candidates and a serious vulnerability for Democrats, forcing those up for re-election to spend the closing weeks defending yet another unpopular health care issue.

¹ American Action Forum, and June 2013 Medpac Report (73 percent of enrollees in stand-alone Part D plans are age 65 or older)