

As the Co-Chair of the [Democratic Seniors Task Force](#) in the House of Representatives, I promise to continue my commitment to advocate for older Americans in my district and across the country. My advocacy for seniors goes back more than 25 years when I was Director of the Illinois State Council of Senior Citizens. Well before I was a senior myself, I worked to ensure that the voices of older Americans were heard, their concerns were put before policymakers, and their needs were met. As Co-Chair of the Seniors Task Force, I am very proud to join with my Democratic colleagues to continue carrying on that same work here in Congress.

The focus of our Seniors Task Force is to shine a light on the needs of American seniors by ensuring they have affordable, reliable health care; financial security; and a dignified quality of life—ideals in the [Seniors Bill of Rights](#), which I introduced in this Congress. I believe it is essential to the well-being of all Americans that we nurture a culture that respects and cares for the most senior members of our society.

One of the most important charges of Seniors Task Force is to keep the financial realities of older Americans at the forefront of policymaking. We must consider the massive hit that many seniors' retirement savings took in the economic downturn and the fact that many older Americans are still working or looking for work, and many are helping care for children and grandchildren hurt by the economic downturn.

Another critical goal of the Seniors Task Force is to dispel myths. For example, older Americans are not a wealthy group: The average income of American seniors is a meager \$18,000 per year. Close to 10% of seniors were considered below the poverty level in 2008. And over a third of all Social Security beneficiaries in America rely on their checks to provide 90% or more of their income. We strengthened Medicare in health care reform and I will continue to protect and strengthen Social Security. I vigorously oppose privatization of Medicare and Social Security and, instead, am working to protect and improve these essential programs.

On Medicare and Medicaid Fraud and Abuse:

It is always important that Congress work to eliminate waste, fraud and abuse but perhaps nowhere is that more important than in Medicare and Medicaid. The best way to address rising health care costs is to improve efficiency and accuracy in payments – not increase cost-sharing or reduce reimbursements to providers below reasonable levels. That is why it is so critical that we do everything possible to prevent abuse and hold fraudsters accountable.

Since 1997, we have recovered \$15.6 billion for the federal treasury as a result of anti-fraud efforts. The Obama Administration has stepped up enforcement activities, creating the Health Care Fraud Prevention and Enforcement Team (HEAT) in May 2009 and holding the first “National Summit on Health Care Fraud” in January 2010.

I am pleased that the Affordable Care Act provides even more tools to fight waste, fraud and abuse. The new anti-fraud provisions include an enhanced background check mechanism to ensure that fraudulent providers are not allowed to “re-up” in Medicare and Medicaid, tougher penalties for those who make false statements or refuse to provide information needed for audits, an enhanced national health care fraud and abuse database, and new funding for Medicare and Medicaid Integrity Programs.

I will continue to monitor these efforts and work to make sure that we do whatever possible to prevent those who want to profit fraudulently at the expense of American consumers.

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