

Spotlight on Medicaid – CQ Budget

Sen. [Ron Johnson](#)'s first hearing at the helm of the Senate Budget Committee, a sometimes-combative affair peppered with familiar partisan arguments, made clear that the new chairman's aim is to bring down Medicaid spending under the banner of trimming fraud and waste.

The Wisconsin Republican, a self-avowed budget hawk, has the top spot after the death last month of the former chairman, [Lindsey Graham](#), R-S.C.. At the hearing's outset Tuesday, Johnson displayed charts of Medicaid spending far outstripping inflation and population growth over the past several decades, laying much of the blame -- as other Republican committee heads have done the past year -- on fraud.

"I wanted to counter false claims that Republicans cut and slashed Medicaid to the bone. It's simply not true," Johnson said, arguing the spending on the entitlement program is rising, not falling.

But Democrats noted that much of the impact of spending cuts in Republicans' "big, beautiful" reconciliation package ([PL 119-21](#)) is set to hit after the midterm elections this fall, and that's when many would feel the full impact. They observed that Medicaid spending had increased for years because there's been a commensurate drop in the number of uninsured Americans.

The Congressional Budget Office [predicts](#) that the trend is about to reverse under the 2025 reconciliation law. It estimates about 11 million people are projected to lose health insurance and Medicaid coverage.

Democrats also vented frustration at the hearing's tone as Johnson repeatedly interrupted to rebut their remarks -- which they said wasn't common practice.

"Welcome to the chairmanship, but I find you are turning this into a debate committee, not a budget committee," Sen. [Patty Murray](#), D-Wash., told Johnson.

The hearing came just as all 47 members of the Senate Democratic caucus on Tuesday called on the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to delay implementation of Medicaid work requirements imposed under last year's reconciliation law [in a letter](#).

"This rule does not strengthen Medicaid; it dismantles it, turning a program designed to protect vulnerable Americans into a system that systematically denies them care," the Democrats wrote. -- *Ariel Cohen*