Health Policies Were a Prominent Theme in Biden's State of the Union Speech

Biden warned about Republicans trying to phase out Medicare and Social Security. Here, PolitiFact checks that claim and others.

February 8, 2023 By Kaiser Health News

President Joe Biden on Tuesday delivered his State of the Union address to a politically divided Congress for the first time, calling for permanent fixes on policy priorities like unaffordable health costs.

In one marked difference from his earlier speeches, attendance in the House chamber was at capacity with no covid-19 limitations in effect. And the lawmakers in the audience, both supporters and opponents, seemed to be in a raucous mood.

Our partners at PolitiFact fact-checked a variety of Biden's statements — ranging from Medicare, Social Security, and the health of the economy to infrastructure and a possible assault weapons ban — during the 73-minute speech. You can read their complete coverage here.

Throughout the address, Biden highlighted bipartisan accomplishments and also talked back when GOP members heckled his claims. His warnings that some Republicans want to phase out Medicare and Social Security riled conservatives, including Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.), who replied from the back row by shouting "Liar!" as others booed. Biden responded, smiling: "As we all apparently agree, Social Security and Medicare [are] off the books now, right?"

Biden also took victory laps, some of which focused on health care initiatives. He talked about the savings to people and to the federal government that would result from allowing Medicare to negotiate what it pays for prescription medicines. He cited legislation he signed into law that, starting this year, would cap insulin costs for Medicare beneficiaries and, starting in 2025, would cap out-of-pocket drug costs for seniors. He also noted that 16 million people signed up for health coverage this year through the Affordable Care Act marketplaces. But his repeated refrain on such points was: "Let's finish the job."

He dedicated an estimated four minutes to his efforts to hold down health care costs — namely prescription drug prices — and pointed a finger directly at Big Pharma. "We are taking on powerful

infrastructure," he said.

Biden also noted how much the state of the union has changed since the early days of covid. He called attention to the end of the public health emergency slated for May 11, but reminded the audience — both in the chamber, where Sen. Bernie Sanders was among the few members seen wearing a face mask, and at home — that there is a continuing need to monitor the coronavirus and to fund the development of new treatments and vaccines.

Here is a sampling of Biden's health care claims checked by PolitiFact:

"Instead of making the wealthy pay their fair share, some Republicans want Medicare and Social Security to sunset. I'm not saying it's the majority."

House and Senate Republican leaders say they don't support this, but at least one senator has broadly floated the idea. Sen. Rick Scott (R-Fla.) released a plan in 2022 that stated "all federal legislation sunsets in 5 years. If a law is worth keeping, Congress can pass it again." (Scott's plan is a policy document that he is promoting again for his 2024 reelection.)

Scott's proposal does not specifically call for a phase-out of Medicare and Social Security, which were created generations ago through federal legislation. And his plan doesn't have widespread support within his party; Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the Republican leader in the Senate, in 2022 said it would not be part of the party's agenda.

Some House Republicans have left open the possibility of changing the programs, including raising the eligibility age. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.) suggested in August that Congress approve Social Security and Medicare annually rather than as an automatic entitlement. But House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said Jan. 29 during a CBS "Face the Nation" interview that cuts to Social Security or Medicare are "off the table."

"We're finally giving Medicare the power to negotiate drug prices."

That's a touch too broad. Although the Inflation Reduction Act will allow Medicare for the first time to negotiate prescription drug prices with manufacturers, the provision will not take effect until 2026. The initial group of negotiable drugs will be limited to 10 that year. More drugs will be added to the negotiation list each year.

The Department of Health and Human Services is barred from negotiating on prescription drugs in the Medicare program until they've been on the market for several years.

This article was originally published on Feb 8, 2023, by Kaiser Health News. It is republished with permission.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.covidhealth.com/article/health-policies-prominent-theme-bidens-state-union-speech