

I voted Yes on H.R. 1173, the Fiscal Responsibility and Retirement Security Act.

This bill would repeal the provisions of the 2010 health care law that created the "CLASS" program. The Community Living Assistance Services and Supports (CLASS) program was included in the health care law with a goal of facilitating access to long-term health care services. The program would provide voluntary enrollees with a cash benefit that could be used to purchase these services. Under the program, enrollees would begin paying premiums in 2013, but benefits would not be paid until 2018, at the earliest.

Importantly, in October 2011, the Obama Administration notified Congress that it did not see any viable way to maintain the CLASS program's solvency and decided not to implement the program. The original 10-year cost estimate of the program did not account for the cost of the program over the long term. Because the CLASS program would be open-ended, there would not be sufficient funds available for the program to meet benefit obligations over a 75-year period, as required by law. Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND) even called CLASS, "a Ponzi scheme of the first order, the kind of thing Bernie Madoff would be proud of."

The CLASS program is another example of a well-intentioned, but woefully ill-conceived, government initiative. The program is fundamentally flawed and would have amounted to Americans wasting their wages to fund an entitlement program which would never benefit them in return. Congress should certainly work toward solutions that provide long-term care access for the American people, but we must do so in a way that does not force a new budget-busting program on the backs of Upstate taxpayers and small businesses.

H.R. 1173 was approved by a vote of 267 – 159.