

# Experts fear Medicare faces bankruptcy

### Proposals by Clinton and Congress attempt to prolong Medicare programs.

WASHINGTON (AP) — The prognosis for Medicare was grave in its latest checkup. Bankruptcy by 2002.

So what did the Clinton administration prescribe? A commission to study the problem. "A complete abdication of responsibility," said Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole.

So what was the first thing the GOP-controlled House did to Medicare?

It rolled back a tax increase on affluent seniors that will put the hospital insurance trust fund \$49 billion deeper in the hole over the next 10 years.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., has said Medicare must be rethought "from the ground up," but assured the elderly his approach will offer them more choices, not take away their traditional, fee-for-service coverage.

Most Americans are being swept by their employers into

fees for physicians, hospitals and nursing homes, make beneficiaries pay more and steer more seniors into managed care. Details are still being worked out, but Dole has talked about saving \$148 billion over five years.

Last year Clinton proposed saving hundreds of billions from these programs for the elderly, disabled and poor as part of his plan to guarantee coverage for all Americans.

Congress rejected the complex scheme and Democrats were routed in last November's elections. A chastened president sent Congress a 1996 budget with not a dime in new Medicare cuts. Let the Republicans prescribe the tough medicine this time, he seemed to be saying.

Without a major overhaul, the bubble will burst when the baby boom generation enters its golden years starting in 2010.

That's a problem that Congress must face up to eventually.

managed-care plans, which hold down medical bills by discouraging lengthy hospital stays and restricting access to specialists. The elderly, like their grown sons and daughters, will probably wind up paying more for choice.

A dozen years ago, the trustees were warning "the drop-dead date was 1990," said John Rother, legislative director for the American Association of Retired Persons. "The idea that in seven years this catastrophe is going to happen has been basically true for the past 15 years."

Congress has pushed back the day of reckoning by nips and tucks at the providers' payments.

The trustees' report says that extending Medicare's prospective payment system and limiting pay increases "could postpone the depletion of the (hospital) trust fund for about another 5 to 10 years."

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# Hospital denies liability in child case

### The brain damaged boy is to remain hospitalized until a settlement is reached.

MIAMI (AP) — Justin Bates was a baby when he was rushed to a hospital with an asthma attack 10 years ago. He has been there ever since, unable to see, speak or walk.

A bureaucratic battle has kept the semi-comatose boy, now 11, institutionalized while his family tries to bring him home.

Cynthia Mendat has tried for years to get the money needed for home care for her son, who suffered severe brain damage in 1985 when his oxygen supply was cut off because of an improperly inserted ventilator tube.

The hospital is run by the North Broward Hospital District, a county agency. And Florida

law says government entities cannot be held responsible for more than \$200,000 without legislative approval.

"There's no amount of money that could compensate her for

**"You're looking at the rights of the individual weighed against the needs of society."**

— Dr. Pat Caralis, chairwoman of ethics committee

losing her child, essentially," said House Claims Committee member Steve Feren. "But dealing with taxpayer dollars, we have to try to come up with something that's fair and reasonable to provide for the child and mother."

Justin's case has been cited

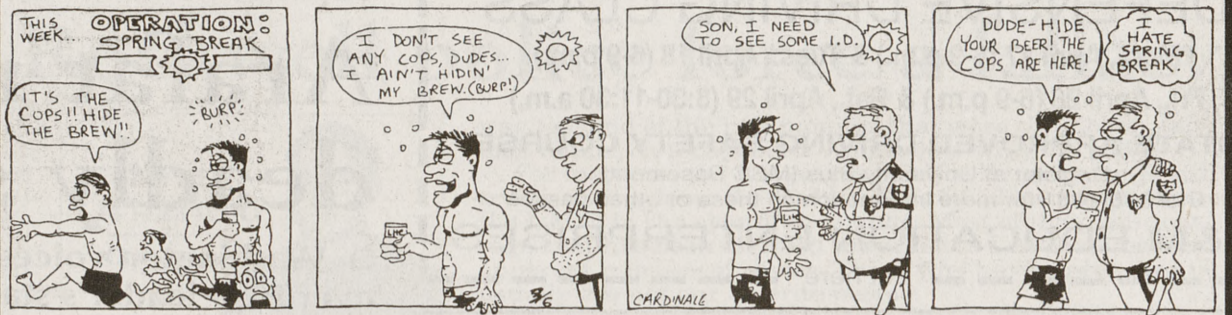
as an example of how laws that try to protect taxpayers by limiting the liability of government agencies can backfire against the neediest people. Broward said its other patients would suffer if it had to make the full payment for the boy.

"You're looking at the rights of the individual weighed against the needs of society," said Dr. Pat Caralis, chairwoman of the ethics committee at Miami's Jackson

Memorial Hospital. "You want to be fair to the individual. This young man will have to be cared for for the rest of his life, and he needs money. You weigh that against the cost of providing care for all the indigent people in North Broward, and you can see that these are difficult things to decide."

## Tubularman

By Boomer Cardinale

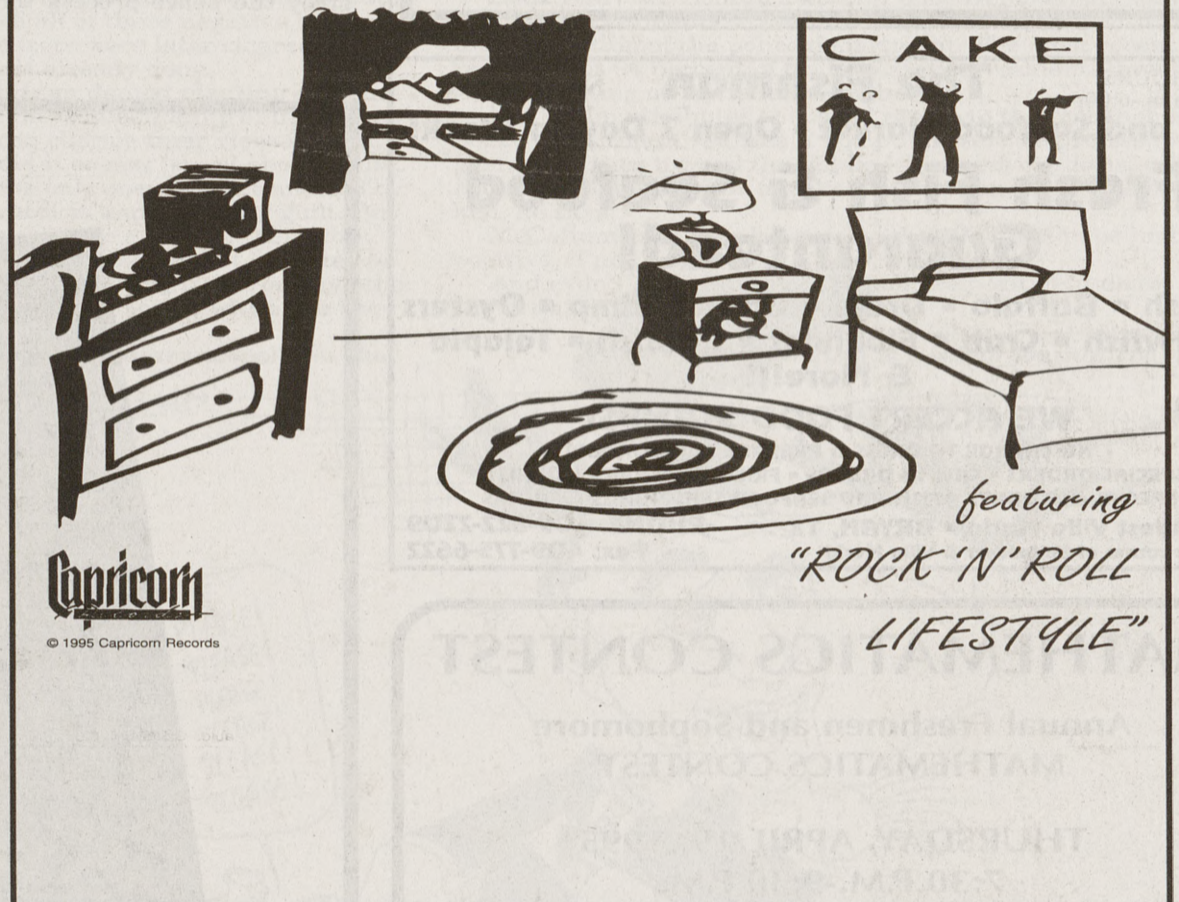


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# CAKE

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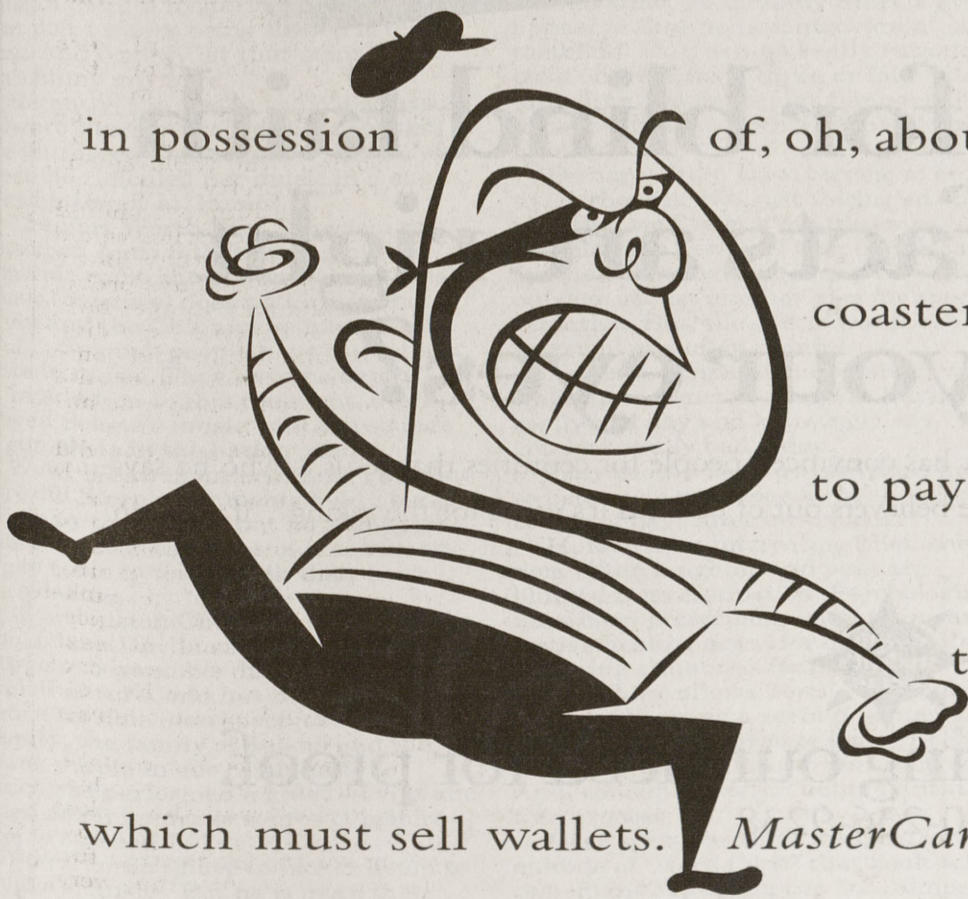
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