

Wendell E. Primus Background

Employment History

Director of Income Security Center on Budget
Contributor Center on Budget
Senior Policy Advisor On Budget and Health Issues Speaker Nancy Pelosi
Senior Policy Advisor, Office Speaker Nancy Pelosi
Director of Income Security Policy Priorities
Director of the Income Security Division Policy Priorities
Director of Income Security Center for Budget and Policy Priorities
Economist Center for Budget and Policy Priorities
Minority Staff Director Joint Economic Committee
Chief Economist for the House Ways and Means Committee and Staff Director for
the Subcommittee On Human Resources Committee
National Head Start Association
Staff Director of the Subcommittee On Human Resources U.S. House of
Representatives
Chief Economist U.S. House of Representatives
Senior Policy Advisor, Office U.S. House of Representatives

*This is an archive page. The links are no longer being updated.
1993.04.07 : Appointment -- Wendell Primus

Contact: Campbell Gardett (202) 690-6343
April 7, 1993

HHS Secretary Donna E. Shalala has announced that she will appoint Wendell E. Primus, 46, of McLean, Va., as deputy assistant secretary for planning and evaluation/human services policy in the Department of Health and Human Services.

In this position, Primus will be responsible for Policy development and research on issues relating to Social Security, disability, welfare and human services, including children and youth programs.

Primus comes to HHS from Capitol Hill where since 1991 he had served as staff director of the Subcommittee on Human Resources, House Ways and Means Committee.

Since 1987, he also had served as chief economist for the House Ways and Means Committee. He was senior staff economist for the committee from 1977 to 1987.

With the subcommittee, he was primary staff author of such major legislative initiatives as the Downey/Hyde Child Support Enforcement and Assurance Proposal and the Gore/Downey Working Family Tax Relief Act. With the committee, he served since 1981 as editor of "The Green Book," which detailed federal spending programs under the jurisdiction of the Ways and Means Committee.

During his years on Capitol Hill, Primus' responsibilities spanned a wide range of issues. He played a major role in budget reform, and also served as Ways and Means Committee staff liaison to the House Budget Committee and the Congressional Budget Office. As staff director and a senior advisor, he made important contributions in the areas of child support, social services, welfare in general, as well as child welfare in particular.

Primus was assistant professor of economics at Georgetown University from 1974 to 1977, a period during which he also served as a consultant for the Mincome Manitoba Income Experiment and for the House Committee on Agriculture.

Between 1969 and 1975, he was director of programming and data processing for the

Rural NIT Experiment, University of Wisconsin. He also taught economics at Iowa State University (1971-1972) and during 1966-1969, developed and adapted computer programs at Iowa State University for use in special economics research.

Primus was born in Eldora, Iowa. He received his bachelor's degree in economics (1968) and doctorate in economics philosophy (1975) from Iowa State University.

His writings include: "Tax Policy and Income Distribution," for Personal Saving, Consumption & Tax Policy, 1992; "Children in - More -Poverty: A Committee Prepares for an Informed Debate," Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 1990; "Financing Medicare Through 1995," National Journal, 1982; and "Tax Incentives for the Promotion of Competition in the Delivery of Health Services," for the Health Care and Industrial Relations Conference Proceedings, University of California, 1981.

Primus is a member of the American Economic Association, the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, and the National Academy of Social Insurance.

<http://www.milkeninstitute.org/events/gcprogram.taf?function=bio&EventID=p4c12&SPID=10181>

Senior Health Policy Advisor, Minority House Leadership, U.S. House of Representatives

Wendell Primus is the senior policy advisor on health issues to Leader Nancy Pelosi.

Prior to this appointment, Primus was the minority staff director at the Joint Economic Committee.

Prior to that position, ***Primus was the director of income security for the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.***

He also previously served in the ***Clinton Administration as a deputy assistant, as the secretary for human services policy at the Department of Health and Human Services.***

Primus has also served as chief economist for the House Ways and Means Committee and staff director for the Committee's Subcommittee on Human Resources.

Primus received his doctorate in economics from Iowa State University.

<http://www.welfareacademy.org/conf/papers/1998.july/primus.shtml>

Wendell E. Primus

Dr. Wendell Primus *joined the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities in June 1997 as the Director of Income Security.* As head of this new division, *Dr. Primus will expand the Center's research in areas including social security, unemployment insurance, child support enforcement, child welfare, income and poverty trends, and federal policy related to welfare law.*

He was a visiting professor of Law and Public Policy at the University of Maryland (School of Public Policy), teaching a class entitled "Welfare Policy" to Law and Public Policy students in the Spring of 1997.

From March 1993 to August 1996, Dr. Primus served as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Services Policy in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. In that capacity, he was primarily responsible for the conduct and coordination of research and evaluation on issues/programs concerning child development, welfare, employment, child support, retirement and disability assistance.

Previous to this position, Dr. Primus was chief economist for the Committee on Ways and Means and Staff Director of the Subcommittee on Human Resources of the U.S. House of Representatives. In this capacity, ***he was primarily responsible for budget-related analysis*** and was deeply involved in drafting the Gramm-Rudman law. He was also the editor of the Committee's "Green Book," a resource document published annually that contains comprehensive data and information on Federal entitlement programs within the jurisdiction of the Committee. In addition, *he was responsible for analyzing welfare, health, social security and unemployment insurance issues.*

Dr. Primus has also served as an assistant professor of economics at Georgetown University and a part-time consultant to the Committee on Agriculture on the food stamp program.

<http://www.chrisjacobshc.com/2010/12/15/pelosi-advisor-admits-comparative-effectiveness-research-a-cost-control-mechanism/>

Pelosi Advisor Admits: Comparative Effectiveness Research a "Cost Control Mechanism"

Earlier today, Wendell Primus – a "[liberal lion](#)," and Speaker Pelosi's chief health care advisor – spoke on a panel about *the health care outlook for the 112th Congress*. Two pages of his Powerpoint slideshow are attached. At the bottom of the second page of the attachment is a list of **"Cost Control Mechanisms" in the health care bill, the first of which is "comparative effectiveness research."**

It is perhaps unsurprising *that one of Speaker Pelosi's closest policy advisors would make such a statement, as Democrats have a long history of making statements in support of cost-based rationing of health care resources:*

A draft House Appropriations Committee report on last year's "stimulus," discussing the impact of comparative effectiveness research: *"Those items, procedures, and interventions that are most effective to prevent, control, and treat health conditions will be utilized, while those that are found to be less effective and in some cases, more expensive, will no longer be prescribed."*

Former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, writing in his book *Critical*: "We won't be able to make a significant dent in health-care spending without getting into the nitty-gritty of which treatments are the most clinically valuable and cost-effective....**The federal government could exert tremendous leverage with its decisions.**"

President Obama, in a *New York Times* interview last year: "The chronically ill and those toward the end of their lives are accounting for potentially 80 percent of the total health care bill out here....There is going to have to be a conversation that is guided by doctors, scientists, ethicists. And then there is going to have to be a very difficult democratic conversation that takes place."

Medicare Administrator Donald Berwick, in a 2009 magazine piece: "The decision is not whether or not we will ration care—the decision is whether we will ration with our eyes open."

Astute observers will also note that the first page of slides includes the following so-called **"Republican provisions" in the bill, the fifth of which is that it "Must reduce [the] deficit."** (Emphasis mine.) If Speaker Pelosi's office believes the bill "MUST" reduce the deficit, does that mean that she will support repealing the legislation if it does not accomplish that objective?

The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office categorized most of the major savings provisions in the health care law as "widely expected" to change, or "difficult to sustain for a long period" – meaning that under a more realistic scenario (as opposed to the rosy scenarios painted by Democrats), the law will likely increase, rather than decrease, federal budget deficits.

It may be difficult to reconcile the statement that the health care law "must" reduce the deficit with non-partisan opinions raising significant questions about the accuracy of that assertion. **Then again, if Speaker Pelosi and Democrats plan to use comparative effectiveness research as a "cost control mechanism" by denying patients access to expensive treatments,** the law may in fact reduce the deficit – at an extraordinarily high price to American patients.

This entry was posted in [Costs and Premiums](#), [Coverage](#), [Medicare](#), [Obamacare](#), [Regulations](#) and tagged "[stimulus](#)", [CBO](#), [comparative effectiveness research](#), [Donald Berwick](#), [House Appropriations Committee](#), [Nancy Pelosi](#), [rationing](#), [Tom Daschle](#), [unsustainable](#), [Wendell Primus](#) on December 15, 2010.

Health Care: 10 Staffers to Know : Roll Call News
http://www.rollcall.com/issues/54_111/-33652-1.html

Health Care: 10 Staffers to Know
These Staffers Help Write the Rx for Health Care

By Stephen Langel and Katie Kindelan CongressNow Staff and Roll Call Staff March 31, 2009, Midnight

Wendell Primus, senior policy adviser for budget and health to Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.)

Age: 62 Birthplace: Eldora, Iowa

Education: B.A., Ph.D., economics, Iowa State University

Primus encompasses the mind of a policy wonk with the political skills acquired through a 30-year career on Capitol Hill. Now, as the Speaker's right-hand man on one of the top issues before Congress, lobbyists say Primus has hit his career stride.

"Throughout his career, this is the job where I've seen him be the most impressive," said a longtime health care lobbyist.

Primus began his legislative career on the House Ways and Means Committee, working on issues from income security and welfare reform to Medicare.

He began working for Pelosi four years ago, and today he oversees the complex task of moving legislation from the committee table to the president's desk.

"My role is to advise the Speaker on health care reform and manage legislation at the staff level," Primus said. "It's making sure that all the bases are touched, from policy development and cost estimates to the press and various stakeholders."

Primus will no doubt play a leading role in crafting legislation aimed at achieving the ambitious overhaul of the current health care system both the Speaker and the president have called for.

"It is a tremendous challenge and opportunity all wrapped into one," he said. ***"This, how we get health care costs under control, should be a bipartisan issue."***

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/20/AR2010062003442.html>
(Conflit avec E. Rahm, incrémentalisme vs Big reform, cf entretien ALB)

In the speaker's office, a quiet liberal lion: Wendell E. Primus

By Mary Ann Akers

Washington Post Staff Writer , Monday, June 21, 2010

Wendell E. Primus is one of the few people on Capitol Hill who isn't afraid of [Rahm Emanuel](#). And Primus isn't even a member of Congress.

With his gray hair, reading glasses and expansive lap -- perfect for story time -- Primus, the top policy adviser to [House Speaker Nancy Pelosi](#) (D-Calif.), is as tenacious and cunning under the surface as he is grandfatherly and polite.

As Pelosi's point man during the epic health-care effort, Primus routinely clashed with Emanuel, the White House chief of staff. When Primus orchestrated a meeting at the height of negotiations, to challenge the White House's position on Medicare payments to doctors, "Rahmbo" went quintessentially ballistic.

"Rahm was fit to be tied," said Primus, with a hint of pride at his own chutzpah. "He did not like to be called on the carpet."

Their conflict was such that, according to one House Democratic leadership aide, Primus -- the liberal stalwart -- and Emanuel, the pragmatic political animal, "couldn't be in the same room together."

Although Primus said he doesn't want to "focus too much on my relationship with Rahm," he had plenty to say about his old pal. None of it too flattering.

During an interview at his cramped office in the speaker's sprawling suite in the Capitol, Primus charged that Emanuel pressed House Democrats to pass a health-care bill before the Massachusetts Senate special election in January.

No way; too much, too fast, Primus told him.

Emanuel then pushed for an incremental approach, Primus said.

"Rahm was making phone calls . . . saying, 'Let's do smaller.' And it didn't work," Primus said. "The speaker was clearly right, and Rahm was wrong."

Emanuel declined to comment for this story.

The tension between the two dates to the Clinton administration, when Emanuel was a top White House policy adviser and Primus, a big cheese at the Department of Health and Human Services, resigned in protest over President Bill Clinton's signing of the 1996 welfare reform bill.

"Wendell is not afraid of anybody," said Peter Edelman, who also famously resigned from the Clinton administration to protest the welfare law.

Asked whether he thought Emanuel held a grudge, Edelman said, "Well, what Wendell and I . . . did was something that was totally at odds, totally 100 percent opposite in a very public way, from what the administration was doing -- and Rahm was the quarterback of that."

Primus, who at 63 has achieved senior statesman status through his lofty position in the speaker's office, is respected and well liked by lawmakers for his expert knowledge of budget policy and his quiet doggedness.

"Wendell probably says the fewest words of any person in senior staff and probably says the most," said Rep. Robert E. Andrews (D-N.J.), a key player in the health-care debate who worked closely with Primus.

Andrews, who counts Emanuel as a close friend, said he "never heard Rahm say, 'Let's go with the smaller bill.' "

Rep. Xavier Becerra (D-Calif.), vice chairman of the House Democratic Caucus, called Primus "indispensable." And he credited Primus in large part for standing up to the "incrementalists" and getting a monumental health-care expansion approved.

"Clearly, the health-care bill would look far different if not for the efforts that Wendell made on behalf of House Democrats and the speaker," Becerra said.