



Leadership Council of Aging Organizations

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In a recent editorial, the Washington Post equated AARP's advocacy on behalf of Social Security and Medicare beneficiaries as "thuggish". This aspersion is a shame for the democratic process.

It's hard to reconcile "thug", which Webster's defines as "brutal ruffian" with your average grandfather, nursing home resident, Sunday school teacher, etc.

Unfortunately, the Post apparently has bought into the myth of the "greedy geezer", well-off retirees whose only concern is how to improve their golf games.

AARP and the other 65 members of the Leadership Council of Aging organizations, currently chaired by my organization, represent thousands of seniors whose primary source of income is Social Security. Those benefits do not provide a luxurious lifestyle; the average amount is \$14,124 per year.

"Wealthy" retirees whose annual incomes exceed \$25,000, already pay income taxes on a portion of their Social Security benefits and those taxes go back into the Social Security system.

The seniors LCAO organizations represent already spend substantial sums out of pocket for the Medicare coverage they receive. They have more than enough "skin in the game". Upper-income beneficiaries pay even more for their coverage than does the average beneficiary.

The Affordable Care Act will reduce the growth of Medicare spending by \$500 billion over the next ten years. The new law includes numerous reforms in the health care delivery system as a whole that will wring inefficiencies and waste out of the system. These initiatives are the right way to rein in the growth of spending on Medicare and health care generally.

The wrong way is to balance the budget on the backs of people who can least afford it. Making the average retiree pay far more for health care coverage while cutting the basic income support program on which she depends would represent the triumph of politics over sound policy.

Social Security was created in the time of greatest economic insecurity in our country. Are we really so poor now that we have to cut back on income and health care coverage for those who have the least?

And now the Post characterizes those who stand up for the frailest and most vulnerable members of our society as "thugs". Presumably AARP has no right to publicize the potential consequences of Social Security and Medicare cuts for seniors who must depend on these programs.

On the contrary, however, the Bill of Rights gives Americans the right to freely associate and to petition the government. Seniors have the right to speak out on the issues that affect them. AARP and other LCAO member organizations are their voice in Washington.

We have every right to hold policymakers accountable for the legislation they write and the votes they cast. And we will do so. That's not a threat, but a promise.