

LEADERSHIP COUNCIL
of
AGING ORGANIZATIONS

Barbara B. Kennelly, Chair

October 19, 2005

Via Fax

United States Congress
Washington, DC

Dear Senator/Representative:

On behalf of the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO), we write to express our strong opposition to proposals that apply across-the-board cuts to domestic discretionary programs. We think the approach is wrong-headed and would significantly inhibit the ability of the aging network to serve older Americans in need throughout the country.

An October 6 Associated Press story titled Calamities Take Major Toll on Elderly stated: "In a season of national calamities, the elderly have taken perhaps the hardest hit." It is ironic and frightening that the population many believe to be suffering most from these disasters could experience additional hardship caused by cuts in federal programs they rely on.

Domestic programs funded through the annual appropriations process include Meals on Wheels and family caregiver support under the Older Americans Act, Section 202 Senior Housing, and Senior Corps programs. They have provided disadvantaged older Americans the opportunity to remain healthier and more independent in their last years. To slash these programs after years of budget restraint and spending freezes threatens to erode the safety net they have provided. Such cuts would also widen the gap between needs and services at a time when our senior population, particularly frail elders over age 85, is the fastest growing demographic in the nation. Now is the time to strengthen the safety net for our most vulnerable citizens, not cut it.

Many of the agencies and organizations affected by these cuts also are now struggling to help confused seniors with the new Medicare prescription drug benefit. Cutting their budgets will make it more difficult for them to provide this important assistance.

Further threatening the elderly are the ongoing attempts by some in Congress to cut Medicaid, including harmful changes to the transfer of assets rules. These cuts could hurt millions of older and disabled Americans across the nation.

Congress has already cut taxes by hundreds of billions of dollars, and is considering additional cuts, without paying for them. Proposing now to cut critical human service programs for vulnerable seniors to pay for disaster relief defies common sense and ignores shared moral values. We urge your rejection of this misguided approach to meeting our national emergency and human needs.

Sincerely,

AFL-CIO
AFSCME Retiree Program
Alliance for Aging Research
Alliance for Retired Americans

*American Association for International Aging
Association of Jewish Aging Services of North America
Catholic Health Association of the United States
Experience Works
Families USA*

*The Gerontological Society of America
International Union, United Auto Workers
Meals On Wheels Association of America
Military Officers Association of America
National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys
NARFE*

*National Asian Pacific Center on Aging
National Association of Foster Grandparent Program Directors
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs
National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers
National Association of Retired and Senior Volunteer Program Directors, Inc.
National Association of Senior Companion Project Directors
National Association of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs
National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, Inc.
National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform
National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare
National Council on Aging
National Indian Council on Aging, Inc.
National Senior Citizens Law Center
OWL, the voice of midlife and older women
Service Employees International Union*