

NEWS – CONGRESSMAN PETE STARK

239 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
(202) 225-5065
www.stark.house.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, March 30, 2011
Stark Contact: Debbie Curtis, (202) 225-5131

Republicans on AARP: Love Them or Leave Them?

WASHINGTON DC –Ways and Means Committee Republicans today released a so-called “investigative expose” of AARP summarizing publicly-available information about the organization’s structure and finances. The report, which culminates a year-long effort by Republicans to punish the organization for its support of the Affordable Care Act, illustrates a dramatic change of heart from 2003, when Republicans praised AARP for its support for the GOP-sponsored Medicare Modernization Act (MMA) and pointed to the organization’s support as a reason to pass the measure.

Ways and Means Committee Ranking Member Sander M. Levin (D-MI), Health Subcommittee Ranking Member Pete Stark (D-CA), and Oversight Subcommittee Ranking Member John Lewis (D-GA), responded to the report:

Ranking Member Stark: "My Republican friends didn't question AARP's motives when the organization endorsed the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003 -- legislation that created a private Medicare drug benefit. Instead, they lauded AARP's endorsement as proving their bill was good for senior citizens. But now, since AARP worked to help enact health reform and will surely oppose Republican plans to convert Medicare to a voucher, privatize Social Security and block grant Medicaid, Republicans want to bring them down. "

Ranking Member Levin: "What a difference eight years makes. Republicans are proving they are a fair weather friend to America's seniors. Today's report is nothing more than the continuation of a witch hunt to seek out and punish proponents of the Affordable Care Act, making it abundantly clear that Republicans will stop at nothing to advance their reckless repeal agenda to gut reforms that improve senior benefits and provide relief from high drug costs."

Ranking Member Lewis: "I find it deeply troubling that Republicans seem to be using congressional resources to silence people and organizations who will disagree with their policy decisions. We have seen them target labor unions, NPR and now AARP. This is no more than a veiled attempt to discredit an organization which can provide significant opposition to the upcoming GOP attempts to privatize Medicare and Social Security. Demonizing opposing views is not in keeping with the democratic ideals set down by our founders and has no place in the people's House."

All the Republican Members of Ways and Means in Congress at the time of MMA's passage voted for the law and their leadership embraced AARP at that time, singing a different tune:

President Bush

"But the groups that speak for the elderly did fantastic work on this legislation. See, there was a lot of pressure not to get something done—for the wrong reasons, I might add. But Bill Novelli, the CEO of AARP, stood strong in representing the people he was supposed to represent and he worked hard to get

this legislation passed. And, Bill, I want to thank you for your leadership. You were joined by Jim Parkel, who is the President of the AARP. Jim, I want to thank you, as well, for doing what was right, for focusing on the needs of the seniors of our country.”

- Remarks by the President at the Signing of the MMA, December 8, 2003, pg. 4

<https://www.cms.gov/History/Downloads/BushSignMMA2003.pdf>

Rep. Dennis Hastert (then Speaker of the House)

“AARP gives you the ‘Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval’ when it comes to seniors’ issues,” said House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, Illinois Republican. “They care deeply about the future of Medicare, and they wouldn’t endorse something that would lead to the end of that program as some critics contend.”

- Washington Times, November 17, 2003

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2003/nov/17/20031117-115810-3771r/>

“Let me be the first to admit that this conference report is not perfect. The far left does not like it. And some of our friends on the far right do not like it. But let me tell you who does like it. The AARP has endorsed it. So has the American Hospital Association and the American Medical Association and almost every other major seniors organization and doctor and patient group.”

- Congressional Record, November 21, 2003, H12271

Rep. Bill Thomas (then Chair of the Ways & Means Committee)

“Tonight, the Republican majority is going to add prescription drugs to Medicare. We earnestly seek our friends across the aisle help in doing this. The conference report before us is bipartisan. It is bipartisan because of the House and the Senate structure. Tonight our friends across the aisle have a chance to make it bipartisan in the House. Our friends say that we are trying to destroy Medicare; but if we are trying to destroy Medicare, why is the American Association of Retired People supporting this proposal? Why is the AARP in favor of this bill? You have heard some very harsh rhetoric from my friends across the aisle describing their abandonment by the AARP. My friends, the AARP has not abandoned you. You have abandoned seniors. AARP has chosen to be with seniors, and they have chosen to be with us.”

- Congressional Record, November 21, 2003, H12248

Rep. Nancy Johnson (then Chair of the W&M Health Subcommittee)

“I do not consider the AARP a special interest group, or the Coalition to Ensure Patient Access a special interest group, or the Alzheimer’s Association a special interest group, or the Kidney Cancer Association a special interest group.”

- Congressional Record, November 21, 2003, H12251-52

“This is a milestone. That is why AARP describes it as a historic breakthrough in the Nation’s commitment to strengthen and expand health security for its citizens.”

- Congressional Record, November 21, 2003, H12260

Rep. JD Hayworth (then Member of the W&M Committee)

“Now, we have heard a lot of wailing and gnashing of teeth about the endorsement of this plan by the AARP. I think rather than tearing up cards or engaging in personal attacks on those who may serve very competently in that association, it might be good to actually listen to the words of our seniors who belong, the millions of seniors who depend on prescription drugs and believe in the AARP. And they readily admit, as all of us would admit, this legislation may not be perfect, but it is a good place to start. We all know, on both sides of the aisle, change comes incrementally. Let us adopt this legislation for America’s seniors and for future seniors.”

- Congressional Record, November 21, 2003, H12251

Rep. Weller (then Member of the W&M Committee)

"This legislation that came out of bipartisan work, it is endorsed by the AARP, a trusted organization that represents millions of American seniors."

- Congressional Record, November 21, 2003, H12255

Rep. Rob Portman (then Ways and Means Member, now Senator)

"This is why the AARP supports this. This is why the AARP is standing up for their seniors."

- Congressional Record, November 21, 2003, H12257

Rep. Billy Tauzin (then Chair of the Energy & Commerce Committee)

"And I think that is why AARP has endorsed our bill, because they know we have gotten a great generous coverage for the low-income American seniors who want to stay in Medicare or who want to choose something else."

- Congressional Record, November 21, 2003, H12260

Rep. Phil Gingrey (now Energy and Commerce Member)

"Mr. Speaker, 35 million senior Members of AARP, 330,000 physician members of the American Medical Association who are providing care to hundreds of millions of Americans and 40 million Medicare beneficiaries, the American Hospital Association, the Rural Hospital Association, the United States Chamber of Commerce; Mr. Speaker, with so many for a prescription drug and Medicare modernization for our beloved seniors, who could be against it, and why?"

- Congressional Record, November 21, 2003, H12262

#