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OPINION

When Right is Left

Exclusive commentary by John S. Pappas

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When I awoke last week, it seemed like any other Tuesday morning. I got up, turned on the news, and went to wash my face.

As I dry, I thought I heard the announcer tell me that the Republican Senate was on the verge of passing a huge new entitlement bill. I figured water must have gotten in my ears and used the towel to try and get it out.

As I dressed, I next heard a Senator extolling the virtues of the new prescription-drug bill, which would spend \$400 billion dollars on helping the elderly get drugs. I looked up just in time to be shocked at seeing the Senator speaking turn out to be Bill Frist, Republican and leader of the Senate. 'This isn't normal,' I thought, feeling a bit disconcerted.

I pondered the meaning of this as I went into the kitchen and put the news on the TV there. They were playing clips of Ted Kennedy and other Democrats railing against the bill, for among other things, costing too much. I spilled coffee all over the counter.

'What the heck is going on today,' I wondered aloud. Had the world gone mad? Had all the planets aligned and caused a reversal of magnetic fields? Republicans don't create humongous new government programs, I told myself, and Democrats don't oppose them.

Traditionally, Republicans extol limited government; this bill would help grow it. Republicans had recently run on the success of Welfare reform; fixing the so-called failures of the welfare programs of the 1960's. Now, there they were creating the largest entitlement since.

And what about the Democrats, I wondered. In my lifetime, it's been said they never met a government spending program they didn't like. I've watched them fight tooth and nail against simply limiting growth of federal programs, and go ballistic when real cuts were proposed. Now here they were condemning the creation of one of the biggest ever.

I had to be dreaming. I shook my head side to side trying to wake up.

The news then went to a clip of President Bush saying that this bill would enable both parties to keep a promise to the nation's seniors. As I tried to recall either party promising the elderly an entitlement very few had asked for and one polls show that only 34% support, I glanced at the calendar to check and see if maybe it wasn't leap day. Then it struck me, we are less than 12 months away from a national election.

'Of course,' I thought, this is vote buying on a grand scale. The Republicans, following the lead of the President and his 'new tone,' have decided to out-Democrat the Democrats by giving the people every imaginable goodie. The Democrats on the other hand, have taken a vow of opposition and would oppose immortality if they thought Republicans had anything to do with it.

Having figured the riddle out, I happily sat down to breakfast. I felt that everything was again right with the world.

A moment later however, a commercial came on from AARP saying how much they supported this Republican bill. AARP supporting Republican legislation was darn-near unheard of and I started feeling strange again.

It got worse when the news came back on; it showed a group of elderly citizens marching with signs in front of the national headquarters of AARP. Senior citizens were protesting their own lobby organization?

This was too much; I turned the TV off and went back to bed.

John S. Pappas is a freelance journalist specializing in socio-political commentary. His work has appeared in the Washington Dispatch, BushCountry.org, Vancouver Independent Media, and Johnny P News, his own site. He may be reached by [here](#).

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