



President
Barbara J. Easterling

Secretary-Treasurer
Ruben Burks

August 8, 2012

Mr. Phil Griffin
President
MSNBC
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York NY 10112

Dear Mr. Griffin:

On behalf of the 4 million members of the Alliance for Retired Americans, I am writing to express my strong disappointment with Joe Scarborough's factually inaccurate and misleading segment on Social Security on the August 6 "Morning Joe."

Mr. Scarborough opted for rhetoric and hyperbole, not letting the facts get in the way of the slanted story he wanted to tell. As Social Security prepares to celebrate its 77th birthday next week, Scarborough never once mentioned the many generations it has helped, the fact that the senior poverty rate is half what it used to be, or that before Social Security we were a nation where people worked until the day they died.

Mr. Scarborough perpetuated the political and media myth that Social Security causes our budget deficit. This is wrong. Social Security has not added a penny to our deficit, and the Social Security Trust Fund has a \$2.7 trillion surplus. When he laments that the program "crowds out" spending in other areas, he uses a false premise to avoid mention of the severe fiscal consequences of the Bush era tax cuts and two long wars being put on our nation's credit card.

The discussions of the worker-retiree ratio and increased life expectancy were both misleading. First, the worker-ratio has remained the same (3-1) for over 30 years now, and while that may skew closer to 2-1 over the next 70 years, that would be the result of the changes in the American economy due to technology. The challenge is to replace these lost jobs with a modern economy that has a strong, sustainable middle class. The segment's repeated references to a higher life expectancy were greatly misleading. A lower infant mortality rate has raised overall life expectancy, but it has remained nearly the same once people enter the workforce. In fact, any gains that have been made have been almost exclusively for the highest income and education levels, not for the physically-demanding blue collar and service sector workers who would suffer terribly if the retirement age were increased to 70, as House Speaker John Boehner has suggested.



The Scarborough-led segment was based on the premise that Social Security should, and must, be cut. With the average retiree receiving only \$1200 per month – and with private pensions, retirement savings, and housing values all a shell of their former selves – things are already quite lean for most retirees. People who have worked hard and paid their taxes all their lives should not bear the burden of unwise fiscal and regulatory policies begun under then-Representative Scarborough's watch.

In saying there would be dire political consequences from changes to Social Security, Mr. Scarborough cited both the wrong year and the wrong issue. The ire directed at then-Representative Dan Rostenkowski was in 1988 over Medicare, not 1983 over Social Security as Scarborough falsely said.

The segment did not mention more positive, more humane alternatives to Social Security's long-term future. For example, Senator Tom Harkin's Rebuild America Act (S. 2252) would both increase benefits and strengthen the program's financial underpinnings by fixing a long-overdue tax inequity in which millionaires pay a far smaller percentage of their income in Social Security taxes than middle class workers do.

Worst of all, Mr. Scarborough fueled the flames of the one of the most corrosive myths in America today – the cynical belief by younger workers that they are paying taxes each week for a Social Security program that will not be there for them when they retire. This is not only wrong, but it insults the legacy and the contributions of one of America's greatest success stories.

The political-media myths perpetuated by Mr. Scarborough's distorted presentation of this issue falsely scare both workers and retirees. Reasonable people can disagree on policy prescriptions and fiscal courses of action. But when these issues are discussed on national TV in such a misleading manner, it only exacerbates the cynicism people have about both government and the media.

I urge you to consider a more responsible and balanced on-air discussion of this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edward F. Coyle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Edward" being the most prominent part.

Edward F. Coyle
Executive Director