

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SENIOR CITIZENS FEEDS MOSTLY AT PUBLIC TROUGH

The National Council of Senior Citizens (NCSC) is an exclusive organization; that is to say, it feeds almost exclusively at the public trough. According to its 1993 filing with the Internal Revenue Service, \$72,910,930 of \$75,956,825 in revenue (96 percent) for the year came from "government contributions."¹

The American taxpayers provide funds to the NCSC through a variety of federal programs. Foremost among these is the Senior Community Service Employment Program operated by the Employment and Training Administration in the U.S. Department of Labor. Between June 1993 and July 1994, NCSC received \$61 million from that grant program. Another \$10 million came from the Senior Environmental Employment Program in the Environmental Protection Agency. The SEE program provides NCSC with cash and the EPA with unofficial workers (over 55) to carry out the agency's environmental aims. These grants thus help subsidize the political advocacy activities of the National Council of Senior Citizens and prevent Congress from obtaining an accurate picture of the size of the EPA workforce and the amount of federal dollars spent on the agency's agenda.

From July 1993 to June 1994, smaller amounts of taxpayer funds flowed to the Council from the Dislocated Worker Assistance program (\$6,000) and the Section 8 Housing Rehabilitation Program that assists NCSC in operating senior citizen housing complexes.

During the 1994 election cycle, the National Council of Senior Citizens actively endorsed candidates and contributed funds for the election of Democratic candidates for Congress. In fact, the NCSC PAC provided at least \$81,500² to Democratic congressional candidates and \$0 to Republican candidates. Therefore, in addition to being deeply involved in campaign activity, the Council is overtly partisan.

This summer, the NCSC has participated actively in the public campaign to oppose Medicare reform. From the national 30th anniversary ceremony for Medicare in the Capitol to local congressional town meetings, the Council has been a major part of the effort to scare senior citizens into believing that their health care safety net is about to be yanked from underneath them.

¹ 1993 IRS Form 990 filed by the National Council of Senior Citizens.

² Federal Election Commission (FEC) summary of PAC activity for the period ending December 31, 1994.

An account of a recent Rhode Island town meeting attended by Senator Claiborne Pell (D) and Representatives Jack Reed (D) and Patrick Kennedy (D) reported that many seniors in the audience “wore the blue-and-white ‘Senior Power’ buttons distributed by the meeting’s sponsor, the National Council of Senior Citizens.” The same news article went on to state that “the council contends that the GOP proposal would cost the typical Rhode Island beneficiary about \$3650 a year in additional premiums, deductibles and co-payments”³—all this despite the fact that no “GOP proposal” has been introduced.

Across the country, on the same day, NCSC regional director Howard Owens stated, “Can anyone believe we can take a (\$270 billion) hit and maintain the quality and quantity of health care? If so, I have a bridge I want to sell you.”⁴ The Council also hosted events for Democratic members of Congress in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (August 18), and Waterloo, Iowa (August 24), to promote the anti-reform message.

Other political activities undertaken by the NCSC include an annual congressional voting scorecard. In 1993, one issue in this analysis was the tax increase on Social Security benefits, which was scored as a “pro-senior” vote.⁵ The Council also was a proponent of the Clinton Administration’s big government health care plan, which failed in 1994.

It is clear that the National Council of Senior Citizens engages in substantial advocacy activities—despite the fact that it is 96 percent taxpayer-funded. In essence, the NCSC functions almost as a *de facto* federal agency, but without the normal restrictions on political activity.

Marshall Wittmann
Senior Fellow in Congressional Affairs

Charles P. Griffin
Deputy House Liaison

The Government Integrity Project examines the practice of permitting tax-exempt organizations that engage in political or legislative advocacy to receive funds from the federal government.

³ Felice J. Freyer, “Democrats Bash GOP on Medicare,” *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, August 29, 1995.

⁴ Tom Philp, “Hospitals Fear GOP Cutbacks,” *Sacramento Bee*, August 29, 1995, p. B1.

⁵ Paul Bramell, “Privatization for public interests?” *The Washington Times*, February 5, 1995.