

## **OWL-National Comments on Policy Priorities**

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As Submitted to

The Democratic Steering and Outreach Committee

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I would like to begin by thanking you for your unwavering support to protecting Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and other programs like the OAA that are vital to the health and economic security of millions of midlife and older women. The protection of these programs is foremost amongst OWL's priorities and your commitment to them has made a very real difference in countless lives.

Thank you also, for your willingness to address the need for a "comprehensive, coordinated, and high-quality system"<sup>1</sup> for the delivery of long-term care services. We look forward to earnest consideration of the recommendations of the Commission on Long-term Care.

There was an inescapable irony in the timing of the release of a recent NBC/Esquire Magazine poll. Just when the squabbling that has come to define Washington resulted in a government shutdown, pollsters offered confirmation of what those outside the beltway already knew--that the majority of the electorate occupy what the poll characterized as "a new American center... bound by a surprising set of shared ideas."<sup>2</sup>

This center is neither monolithic nor easily pigeon-holed. It includes both what the pollsters identified as the "Gospel Left" and members of the "Righteous Right". But strip away the differences in social status and lifestyle choices, look beyond geographical distance and political affiliations, and one discovers that the populace is united in a commitment to certain enduring American ideals.

Among these is a demand for fairness. Americans believe in a level playing field.

The majority believe that government has a role in ensuring that everyone who plays by the rules has a fighting chance. And they believe that everyone should have the opportunity to earn a decent living.

These ideals must remain foremost as the future of such critical programs as Social Security and Medicare are in the cross hairs. It worries me to see otherwise serious people in DC considering cuts in Social Security benefits as the best way to 'fix' the program. Some have framed this option as the only sensible path forward. It is not.

In fact, another survey of Americans by the National Academy of Social Insurance earlier this year showed widespread support for a 10-year phase-out of the cap on earnings taxed. Public education on this issue would resonate with these centrists who are concerned about fairness.

A spotlight on issues – instead of party affiliation – reveals many more common values than are ever hinted at on the Sunday talk shows.

Rather than be discouraged by the disconnect between what the American public supports and what policy makers have been willing to seriously consider, the polls point to a critical juncture in American politics. We are increasingly a nation of shared purpose. In fact, it is apparent that the most destructive division is not within the American people: it is between the people and those whom they entrusted with the responsibilities of public office.

I was heartened when, earlier this week, Rep. Ribble, R from Wisc. and Rep. Mulvaney, R representing S.C. expressed a willingness to consider a higher income cap as a means of addressing Social Security's long-term viability<sup>3</sup>-- an option once considered anathema to conservatives. Perhaps this marks the beginning of a new era in which partisan hyperbole gives way to elevated discourse and a focused on finding meaningful solutions to people's very real problems.

The group No Labels has it about right: Stop Fighting. Start Fixing. Whoever steps up to lead the way to the higher ground where most Americans want to be will eventually be rewarded by those voters.

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<sup>1</sup>Section 643 of American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-240) establishing the Commission on Long-term Care

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.esquire.com/blogs/politics/new-american-center-1113>

<sup>3</sup> CQ Roll Call "Some Republicans Open to Raising Social Security Cap