

It's agreed: Kill elderly to cut costs

by Kathleen Klenetsky

In 1984, then-governor of Colorado Richard Lamm outraged the nation when he publicly demanded that the elderly “die and get out of the way.” But four years later, Lamm’s call for killing off the nation’s aging and other so-called useless eaters has been enthusiastically adopted by America’s ruling elite, who have decided to make the elderly bear the brunt of the harsh austerity regime which they are now cooking up under the rubric of “balancing the budget.”

That a bipartisan consensus on this grotesque policy has been forged was signaled June 9, when a coalition of liberal congressional Democrats, including such leading lights as Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.) and fiscal conservative Republicans soundly defeated a long-term health care bill sponsored by Rep. Claude Pepper (D-Fla.), Congress’s leading spokesman for the elderly.

The *Washington Post* and other media outlets greeted the bill’s rejection as a sign that the “Pepper era” in U.S. politics was over, and that Congress was finally beginning to develop the “guts” to say no to the country’s senior citizens and their allegedly insatiable appetite for more and more public funds.

Just one day before the House’s watershed vote, two key political insiders—James Cannon, a former aide to Gerald Ford and Nelson Rockefeller, and a prominent member of the New York Council on Foreign Relations, and Stuart Eizenstat, who served as Pres. Jimmy Carter’s leading domestic affairs adviser—had declared open war on America’s senior citizens.

The two men, who co-direct American Agenda, a new group set up by former Presidents Ford and Carter to “define the issues” for the next President, told a Washington conference that far too great a proportion of the nation’s resources was being siphoned off by those over 65. “We’ve got to change the political emphasis by shifting some of the money that keeps going to the elderly,” said Cannon, while Eizenstat specified that the United States is spending “a disproportionate amount of our money on health care for the elderly.”

Cannon and Eizenstat attempted to make this blatantly genocidal orientation more palatable by claiming that the money saved could be diverted to programs for children, who, they insisted, were being denied their fair share because of the senior citizens lobby’s superior political muscle.

Neither Cannon nor Eizenstat provided specific measures for cutting off the elderly, but others have.

Last summer, Daniel Callahan, director and co-founder of the Hastings Center, which has spearheaded the pro-euthanasia drive of the last decade, published a book which railed against the elderly for daring to expect longer and healthier lives. Entitled *Setting Limits: Medical Goals in an Aging Society*, the book claimed that there is a “natural life span,” and that trying to extend it beyond 75-80 years, was immoral and a waste of resources.

Medical advances have created “a demographic avalanche by harmfully increasing the number and proportion of the elderly and also, in the process, distorting the ratio of old to young,” wrote Callahan, who freely acknowledged in his preface, “I know and respect” Richard Lamm. The idea that “humane medical care and cure for the elderly sought in the 1960s and 1970s could turn out to be the occasion of a new social threat. . . . [It] is not unexpected perhaps that uneasiness has begun to appear about expenditures on the elderly. . . . For the old to make an unlimited claim upon medical resources, to want the frontier of death constantly pushed back, will be seen by young and old for what it is, a danger . . . an unconscionable demand upon societal resources that could be better deployed.” (This latter argument is particularly preposterous: The reason there is such disproportion between young and old is that, thanks to the neo-malthusian propaganda and policies spread by Callahan et al. over the past 20 years, the number of children being born has dropped precipitously.)

The solution which Callahan proposed to this “threat” is to set limits on what health care the elderly receive, specifically through terminating all life-extending medical treatment for everyone in their 70s or older. Callahan also developed a whole set of criteria for when it is “morally” permissible to deny not only high-technology medical care to the aged, but food and water as well.

Callahan’s basic arguments have found their way into the center of policy debate. A recently-established organization called Americans for Generational Equity (AGE) have been working like blazes to slash spending on the elderly, by putting out sick propaganda claiming that the aging are living too high on the hog, and looting the country’s young and middle-aged.

Wall Street banker and Republican honcho Peter Peterson wrote a major feature for the October 1987 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* which relied heavily on work done by AGE’s research director, Neil Howe. Peterson, who founded the Bipartisan Budget Appeal, a group of bankers and similar types which lobbies for budget cuts and played a key role in helping defeat the Pepper bill, wrote that the United States must drastically cut government spending and overall consumption, and blamed spending on the elderly—from Social Security to Medicare—as a principal source of America’s budget problems.