



Trump's Budget Threat to Meals on Wheels Actually a Media Con, Say Rightbloggers

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Last week The Leader's annual budget outline was released and, as expected, it was a conservative dream, stuffing the military and homeland security like foie gras geese and cutting the arts, the sciences, and aid to the poor.

When some people complained that the new budget would hurt beloved institutions like Meals on Wheels, rightbloggers, still smarting from the bad publicity and voter rebellion attending the release of Trumpcare, worried a bit — until they settled on a good old-fashioned blame-the-media strategy.

Some conservatives have rejoiced that the budget sticks it to their bleeding-heart opponents — “Watch: Tucker Carlson laughs at liberal women upset over Trump's budget cuts to public arts,” cackled Glenn Beck's The Blaze. The smarter ones tried convincing whatever non-conservatives were still taking them seriously that it wouldn't be so bad if they didn't squirm.

At Bloomberg, for example, Megan McArdle assured readers that The Leader was merely “trimming back, though far from eliminating, the post-1960s attempt, sadly as-yet-unsuccessful, to micromanage poverty out of existence.” Who could feel bad about that? She also suggested most voters would happily approve cuts to “a zillion programs they have never heard of, to help some special interest they'll never meet,” such as black people.

In framing their responses, some liberals highlighted a budget victim those voters *had* heard of, and which had helped special interests they may have met or even been raised by: Meals on Wheels, a charity that famously sends volunteers to bring the elderly homebound food and companionship.

At first, conservatives were defensive, and tried to argue that the geezers wouldn't suffer too badly. Nick Gillespie of Reason argued “Seniors Won't Starve if Meals on Wheels Loses Government Grants,” and that the feds do too much already for special interest groups like starving old people.

“We have gotten so used to increased government spending on everything that any cut to any program is automatically cast in apocalyptic terms,” griped Gillespie, and if America were ever going to address its “massive, persistent deficits,” it would have to get tough. He admitted in

some states “local citizens (and corporations and charities such as The United Way) would need to step in to fill the void” in MoW funding, but that was only as it should be; Reason has long pushed to replace public with private funding of government resources — see their sympathetic treatment of pay-or-burn fire departments.

Fred Lucas at The Daily Signal did the so’s-your-old-Obama bit: In 2012, he noted, Obama cut \$3.7 million from the HHS Community Development Block Grant program that helps fund Meals on Wheels. Sure, The Leader was cutting billions from the program and zeroing it out — but, as a rightwing think tank source told Lucas, “Obama didn’t say get rid of it, but he did say it’s difficult to measure the outcomes,” which is like saying the kid’s biological father disciplined him harshly, so it’s only natural that his stepfather should beat him to death.

As the debate heated up, MoW issued a statement, clarifying that it was endangered but not specifically targeted. MoW receives funding from two federal departments: Health and Human Services and its Administration for Community Living, which manages funding from the Older Americans Act; and Housing and Urban Development and its Community Development Block Grant program. Both sources are slated to be cut — HHS by 17.9% (though the effect on the Administration for Community Living is not yet known), and HUD’s Community Development Block Grant program in its entirety.

“The impact on these funds has not yet been announced,” said MoW, “but, given the proposed 17.9% cut prescribed for HHS, could be at risk.”

As it came out that the program was merely at sword’s point rather than already slashed to death, mainstream and liberal publications updated to reflect the complicated funding situation; Time Inc.’s *Money*, for example, changed its headline to acknowledge that “because Meals on Wheels gets funding from other sources, it might not actually be eliminated, but it could be severely curtailed.”

Similarly, prominent conservatives also declared that the situation was complicated. Kidding! Actually they said the media was doing fake news again, and you all should stop worrying about Meals on Wheels and start worrying about the Lügenpresse.

At *National Review* Walter Olson called the media coverage “false” and informed readers “cuts have not been announced in Older Americans Act funding, although the group fears that they may lie ahead.” Perhaps sensing this was not reassuring enough, Olson quoted Reason’s Scott Shackford, who declared that “the Community Development Block Grant Program Is Awful and Should Be Cut” because it’s “chock full of cronyism and corruption” and merely uses worthy programs like MoW as a cover: “We help fund Meals on Wheels’ is how the government sells the CDBG program,” he said. Olson agreed: “It’s important to the CDBG program’s political durability that its grantees wind up sprinkling a bit of extra money on popular programs” like MoW.

So, would Olson or Shackford save the worthy MoW by detaching its fate from that of the unworthy Block Grant program? That seemed never to have occurred to either of them: Shackford was content to observe that “even the parts of the program that aren’t corrupt get hosed,” while Olson spent most of his remaining space berating the press, in part for failing to

take “a charitable reading” of budget director Mick Mulvaney’s “intended point” at his disastrous press conference on MoW and the budget cuts. Mulvaney had tried to tell the press “how social programs had often not been shown to have benefits,” said Olson, and the media decided, for some reason, that he was talking about MoW. (Mulvaney said, among other things, “We can’t spend money on programs just because they sound good. And Meals on Wheels sounds great.” Amazing that reporters wouldn’t give the administration that gave them Sean Spicer and Kellyanne Conway the benefit of the doubt.)

Other conservatives also pulled the fake-news routine: “Media hysteria over supposed Meals On Wheels cuts debunked from Left and Right,” said Legal Insurrection. “. . . Trump is not cutting, and is certainly not eliminating, Meals on Wheels,” they added, because as long as they’re being tendentious why not go all the way.

“*It wasn’t true,*” italicized Jazz Shaw of Hot Air; the block grants “aren’t as closely tied to Meals on Wheels as the press (or pork barrel loving politicians) would have you believe,” and even if those grants “could theoretically be on the chopping block” — just theoretically, mind you! — The Leader probably won’t do it now because it would be “a politically suicide move” thanks to that damned liberal media, who should stop scaring people and “spend their time highlighting the need for more donations from private citizens who are willing and able to help,” because that’s how government is supposed to work — conservatives tear holes in the safety net, and desperate citizens take up a collection to mend it.

“Nor will seniors perish if the minor aid to Meals on Wheels from the Community Block Grants is cut,” scoffed Clarice Feldman of American Thinker, who bade readers “ignore the media” and “keep your eyes on the ball” — that ball being the subject of most of her column: The Leader’s claim that Obama spied on him, which Feldman said “still has legs. . . the president is confident the truth will out and soon.”

Feldman has a point: With a fantastic conspiracy like *that* all but proven true by The Leader's conviction that it is, why would any reporter be paying attention to the bogus Meals on Wheels story? Next they'll be saying The Leader's cuts to the EPA will be bad for the environment, which doesn't even make sense. Just take rightbloggers' word for it, and everything will be fine — and if it's not, we can always pivot to the "Watch: Tucker Carlson laughs at liberal women upset over heat death of the planet" headlines.