



# MADISON OP-ED SERIES

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## **WHY DOES THE GOVERNMENT WANT TO PICK ON UNCLE BERT?**

**by John R. Smith**

I walked over to my uncle Bert's house the other night and found him in his garage biting nails in half. "Hey Bert, isn't that pretty hard on the old dentures?" (Bert is nearly 80 and has been wearing dentures for some years.)

"Maybe so," he replied, "but I'm so furious with those guys in Washington..." He didn't finish his thought; he was busy washing down the last nail with a swallow of beer.

"What'd they do now?" I asked.

"They want to make your aunt and me pay higher Medicare premiums just 'cause we have retirement income of \$76,000. They say we're rich. Hell, we aren't rich. Oh, sure, we've got some savings and a few stocks, but we're like that couple in the TV commercial. You know, 'we took walks instead of vacations, and we shared secrets instead of champagne.' In other words, we sacrificed to save a few bucks so we could take care of our-

selves in our old age. And now the politicians in Washington want to take it away from us! It's just not right...in fact, it's not even legal!"

"What do you mean?"

"You're as bad as those boys in Washington—I guess you haven't read the Constitution either! It says the government has to treat everybody the same. For example the Fourteenth Amendment says government can't 'deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the law.' That means it's not supposed to discriminate against its own citizens. And making your aunt and me pay a higher rate for Medicare coverage just because we were responsible and saved some money during our working years...that's discriminating against us for being thrifty. Hell, being responsible is supposed to be a good thing. You'd think the government would encourage people to take care of themselves, not

**"You'd think the government would encourage people to take care of themselves, not penalize them for it."**

penalize them for it. If the government forces people like Louise and me to pay a higher rate while people who didn't save—who spent all their money on cars and vacations—get to pay a lower rate...that's just plain wrong and the Constitution says they can't do it!

“And here's another way they're pickin' on us” he added. “The president says single people on Medicare should pay a higher premium if they make \$50,000 or more per year, but married couples have to pay higher Medicare premiums if they make just \$75,000 or more per year; not \$100,000...\$75,000. Discriminating against people 'cause they happen to be married...that's wrong too!”

“I see your point, Bert. Hand me a nail.”

“You know, if this thing gets passed, there sure are an awful lot of us retirees in Florida who are going to be treated unfairly by our own government. Our congressmen better think about what they're doing 'cause we've got a pretty darned good voting record.”

“It might be a good idea if they'd re-read the Constitution, too,” I added. “After all, they did take an oath to uphold it.” Uncle Bert just rolled his eyes, finished his beer, and reached for another nail.

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*John R. Smith is vice president of the James Madison Institute, a nonprofit research organization dedicated to improving government.*

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