

# Laughing Gas

## Gaseous Planet— Medicare Man

By Harrison Chow, M.D.

It is widely known within the Washington Beltway that the real political divide in the United States is not between Democrats and Republicans, nor rich and poor, but rather between young and old. The elderly Medicare generation, represented by the American Association of Retired Persons, is purported to be the wealthiest and most powerful political force in the history of American politics.



image courtesy of  
rotse1.physics.lsa.umich.edu/summary/defs/galaxy.jpg

I spoke with long-time AARP President Cunningham “Medicare Man” Grey at the AARP’s corporate office off the lush 18th green of the Palm Springs Country Club about the dramatic impact that elderly Americans and the AARP are having upon American health care.

**HC:** Thank you for meeting with me. I’m surprised that the AARP moved its office cross-country to Palm Springs from Washington, D.C.

**CG:** One of the advantages of modern technology is that we can relocate to a venue that is warm year-round, and yet still stay intimately connected to the federal government.

**HC:** How’s that? Medicare and Social Security policy is made on the East Coast, not in the sand trap of the 18<sup>th</sup> green.

**CG:** I have one phrase for you—“IRDs.”

**HC:** What is an “I-R-D”?

**CG:** An IRD is an “improvised reminder device.” As you know, terrorists use cell phone-activated “improvised explosive devices” or “IEDs” to blow up targets. We wondered: What if we had the power of the IED magnified by 60 million voting retirees? What would happen? That’s how we became excited with the idea of the IRD.

**HC:** You threaten to blow up Senators and Congressmen?

**CG:** Hardly! Our IRDs, when dialed and activated by the cell phone, only give off a 12-volt shock—just enough to make you wince.

## Laughing Gas (cont'd)

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**HC:** How did you get federal legislators to agree to carry this IRD device?

**CG:** The AARP made Washington politicians an offer that they couldn't refuse: Get an IRD and get elected, or refuse and be voted out next term. They don't even have to worry about carrying them. They simply fly out to Palm Springs to get their IRD surgically implanted after a round of golf or a visit to a spa.

**HC:** Wow, the IRD gives new meaning to how to stay "connected" to your elected—or should it be "electrified"?—representatives. The IRD should certainly spark them into action. But now I must ask, what is the AARP's position on the deepening fiscal crisis that threatens to bankrupt Medicare?

**CG:** Our down home position is really very simple. We've paid our dues, and we should get medical care for free—free, nada, zip, zero, complimentary. Comprende, amigo?

**HC:** Hey, I get it, but with a surging elderly population, and the advances in the medical sciences, and a resultant massive boost in medical costs, Medicare soon will be unable to meet its obligations.

**CG:** Now just try to understand. Medicare and America's goals are the same—to provide the elderly with the best health care available for free. Everything, and I mean everything, else is secondary. For example, this year we had the Congress eliminate the school lunch program from the federal budget to pay for the new generation of titanium pacemakers. We need titanium. You can go into an MRI with titanium.

**HC:** But, respectfully, you know that recent studies have shown that the average Medicare recipient's contributions in today's dollars would buy, at best, a single bottle of outdated penicillin tablets, not the latest pacemaker.

**CG:** Doctor, let me remind you that my generation, the Medicare generation, defeated Hitler, Mussolini, Hirohito, Stalin and Mao, landed on the moon, invented the computer chip, the Internet—Al Gore is one of us, isn't he?—and cell phones, and created what we call "modern medicine." What has your generation done?

**HC:** Uh, let me think. My generation invented the iPod?

**CG:** What's an iPod?

**HC:** Someone told me that the iPod is a mysterious and magical device that allows spoiled suburban kids to listen to urban gangsta' rap at the mall.

## Laughing Gas (cont'd)

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**CG:** Doesn't sound too impressive to me. Oh, please excuse me. I have to make a phone call.

The Medicare Man, while on the phone, turns on a 60-inch high definition flat screen T.V. in his office: We see on C-SPAN that Senator Ted Kennedy from Massachusetts is speaking before Congress about the need to increase Medicare taxes. It is quite obvious that Senator Kennedy is sweating profusely.

**HC:** I notice that Senator Kennedy is sweating a lot; are you calling his IRD right now?

**CG:** Yes, but that's not why he is sweating. I've called Senator Kennedy so many times that I think he is immune to a single shock.

**HC:** Well, why is he sweating so profusely? I hope that he's OK.

**CG:** He's sweating because I've threatened to post his IRD's cell number up on the AARP Web Site.

*Dr. Harrison Chow is a practicing anesthesiologist in San Jose, California. He also teaches regional anesthesia at Stanford when nobody is looking. You may reach him at <hchow@stanfordalumni.org>. Recently, he received notification from Medicare that he will qualify for benefits when he turns 90 years of age.*

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