

Misleading claims on Social Security

By [Stephen Gorin](#) / [For the Monitor](#)

Re "Social security vanishes as a political issue" (Sunday Monitor Nation & World section, Oct. 30):

Lori Montgomery's claim that "Social Security is sucking money out of the Treasury" is misleading at best.

The gap between what Social Security pays out and what it takes in is more than offset by interest on the funds the program loans the government. According to the Social Security trustees, when these interest payments are factored in, Social Security is actually in surplus and will be until 2022. Montgomery should be aware of this since she cited the trustees' report.

Equally misleading is her claim that the \$2.6 billion Social Security trust fund is essentially worthless since "the government has borrowed every cent." It is true that the money in the trust fund is loaned out, but in exchange Social Security receives interest-bearing bonds backed by the full faith and credit of the U.S. government. This is a solemn obligation that cannot be ignored.

In principle the Social Security bonds are no different than the savings bonds many of us own or the Treasury bills held by wealthy individuals and foreign governments. Will we really allow the government to renege on its obligation to Social Security while making good on its debts to others?

Montgomery also misunderstands the link between Social Security and the national debt. It is true that when Social Security's expenses exceed its income, the Treasury must come up with funds to cover the bonds and interest due on them. To do this, it must borrow funds elsewhere, which increases publicly held debt. This does not add to the total national debt, however, because redeeming the bonds also reduces the Treasury's obligation to Social Security. The result is, as the Social Security actuary put it, a "wash."

It is disturbing that a leading reporter for the Washington Post would so misunderstand and misconstrue the challenge facing this critical program. Social Security does face a long-term funding problem beginning in 2036. Most experts agree it can be addressed without much difficulty.

It is unconscionable for the Post to contribute to the alarm felt by many that Social Security will not be there for them.

Montgomery has a right to her opinion, but it should be on the opinion page and not allowed to masquerade as news or factual reporting.

(Stephen Gorin is executive director of the New Hampshire chapter of the National Association of Social Workers.)