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THE LARGEST PAID NON-DAILY NEWSP

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TOP STORY >>AARP tells voters: Be informed

By SARA GREENE
Leader deputy managing editor

In September, the Association for the Advancement of Retired Persons (AARP) launched a “Don’t Vote” campaign to tell voters not to cast a ballot without knowing where the candidates stand on the issues. “For the most part, the feedback I’ve re-ceived from people about the ad has been positive. Some people worried a bit because they thought it really would discourage people from voting, but mostly people think it’s witty and creative, it makes you think,” said Billie Ann Myers of Jacksonville, president of AARP Arkansas.

According to a press release by David Sloane, AARP senior managing director of government relations and advocacy, the ad was designed to get voters’ attention. “We all worry when candidates aren’t willing to clearly explain where they stand on the issues. Voters want to make an informed choice at the polls, and dontvote.com is a big step toward this goal,” Sloane said.

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Voters can visit dontvote.com to view AARP Voters' Guides. The guides have unedited responses from the state's candidates for governor, lieutenant governor, the state senate and house on issues such as Medicaid, nursing home reform and payday lending.

A recent poll of the state's 351,000 AARP members showed bipartisan opposition to giving nursing homes additional protection from lawsuits. AARP members support protecting consumers from predatory payday lending with clearly displayed loan fees and reasonable pay back terms. Payday loans are short-term, high interest loans. Payday lending alternatives supported by the AARP include creating a small loan fund run by a nonprofit organization funded by Arkansas banks and requiring consumers to take credit counseling courses to get loans from such a fund.

Arkansas AARP members are more likely to vote for a candidate who supports allowing Medicaid funds to be used for services to that help people live in their own homes or communities instead of in long-term care facilities such as nursing homes. Such services include making it easier for companies to build assisted living facilities, better transportation for residents with limited mobility and wheelchair accessible public transportation.

In the 2006 voter guides, nearly all the candidates support AARP's positions on these issues. "AARP members tend to vote regularly, that's a big stick to carry (politically)," Myers said.

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