

# STRENGTHEN SOCIAL SECURITY

## ...don't cut it.

October 24, 2011

Dear Representative:

The [Strengthen Social Security Campaign](#) – a diverse coalition of over 320 national and state organizations representing over 50 million Americans – urges you to cosponsor H. Con. Res. 72, introduced by Representative John Conyers.

The resolution expresses the sense of Congress that the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction should not propose any cuts in benefits to Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid. With respect to Social Security, no benefit cuts includes no increase in Social Security's retirement age and no reduction in Social Security's cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) by adopting the chained CPI (Consumer Price Index) – both of which, we fear, the joint committee may be discussing behind closed doors.

The so-called chained CPI would take \$112 billion over the next 10 years directly out of the pockets of beneficiaries, including retirees, widow(er)s, people with disabilities, and the dependent children of those beneficiaries. Because the cut compounds over time, it would result in considerable hardship for millions of beneficiaries, especially the oldest of the old. Such a cut is totally misguided because, among other reasons, it does not take into account the higher share of spending devoted to health care by seniors and people with disabilities. It also would violate a promise made by many officials that they would not cut the benefits of current beneficiaries or of persons nearing retirement.

Our coalition believes strongly that Social Security should not even be part of the Joint Committee's jurisdiction. Social Security has not added a penny to the deficit. It, by law, cannot because it is self-financed, can only pay benefits if it can fully cover the costs, and has no borrowing authority. Including Social Security in deficit-reduction legislation – even if it is stated that the changes are done for solvency purposes and all savings will be held in Social Security's trusts – will reinforce the widespread perception that Social Security is being raided to fund other government programs or to mask the true size of the deficit.

If, at a later time, Congress chooses to undertake Social Security reform, it should follow the will of the people who, according to multiple polls, strongly oppose any cuts to Social Security's modest benefits – whether it is through an increase in the retirement age, a reduction in the COLA, or cutting Social Security's vitally important but modest benefits in any other way. As experts, we believe that the public's preference is also unquestionably the best retirement income policy, especially given the large losses many older and middle-age persons have sustained in the value of their homes, pensions and other assets and the employment difficulties many are experiencing.

Nor should Medicare benefits be cut. Medicare beneficiaries are mainly people of modest means; half of whom had incomes below \$22,000 in 2010. Already, more than one-quarter of many beneficiaries' Social Security check is eaten up by out-of-pocket health care costs. Despite covering those who typically use the health care system most frequently – seniors and people with disabilities – Medicare has done a much better job of controlling health care costs than private health insurance plans. While Medicare's costs per person increased by 4.3 percent a year from 1997 to 2009, the costs of similar benefits under private insurance rose 6.5 percent – 50 percent more, according to Department of Health and Human Services data.

As health care costs increase system-wide, Medicare's costs rise as well. The solution to controlling Medicare's costs is to slow the growth of health care costs for everyone – not to cut Medicare's benefits. That simply shifts costs to the sickest and oldest among us, forcing some seniors and people with disabilities to forego treatment, living shorter, less healthy – and more medically costly – lives as a result.

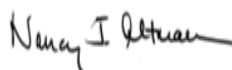
Nor should Medicaid be cut. Like Medicare, its costs are rising due to rapidly rising health care costs, private as well as public. Cuts in federal funding to Medicaid will shift costs to states, if they have the funds to pick up the shortfall, or worse, to individuals and families who can least afford it. More troubling still, it may make life-saving medical care inaccessible for those who need it.

As more and more people lose their employer-provided health insurance, while financially strapped states cut Medicaid, the last thing the nation's seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income children need is for the federal government to slash the program at the national level. Like Social Security and Medicare, this vital program should be strengthened, not cut.

Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid represent the best of America's values, including caring for aging parents and neighbors. If the Joint Committee and Congress cut Social Security, Medicare, or Medicaid you would not be representing those whom you have been elected to serve. Poll after poll has shown that Americans overwhelmingly support these programs and do not want to see them cut. Moreover, cutting them would be weakening the economic security of all Americans. While that would be bad policy anytime, it would be disastrous in this time of widespread economic loss.

For all these reasons, we urge you to cosponsor H Con Res 72.


Sincerely,



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Campaign Co-Chair



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