

STRENGTHEN SOCIAL SECURITY

...don't cut it.

Policies that would Cut Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

As Congress and the new Administration begin setting their legislative agenda for the 115th Congress, legislators should be especially watchful for proposals that would cut or weaken our Social Security system. The American people did not vote for cuts to Social Security, and lawmakers should ensure that its vital protections are maintained. Any cuts to benefits or changes that alter the fundamental promises of these programs to the American people cannot be accepted. **Members of Congress should continue to fight against well-known threats to Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI), including proposals that would raise the retirement age, reduce cost-of-living adjustments through the chained CPI, means-test benefits, or otherwise cut benefits.** Finally, they should watch for lesser-known proposals that would cut benefits or weaken our Social Security system. Some of these lesser-known proposals, previously attempted by Social Security opponents in recent years, include:

Cuts Impacting Social Security's Administrative Budget

- **Cuts to the Social Security Administration's administrative budget.** Unnecessarily limiting the amount of Social Security's revenues that can be spent by the Social Security Administration (SSA) through the appropriations process. SSA's administrative budget is not paid for by general revenues, but directly from Social Security's revenues.
 - Social Security's administrative expenses already account for less than one penny of every dollar spent (0.7 percent). And Congressional budget cuts have already reduced SSA's already modest operating budget by 10 percent (adjusted for inflation) over the last six years.
 - Cuts to SSA's administrative budget have forced the agency to reduce staff and close field offices, and have further burdened the already strained disability determination system, which confirms eligibility for DI beneficiaries. These cuts greatly reduce the critical services that SSA provides to the American people.¹
- **Diverting administrative funding to target waste, fraud, and abuse.** Budgetary measures that unnecessarily divert SSA's already strained budget towards fraud detection and program integrity measures.
 - Fraud and waste in our Social Security system are already extremely rare, and SSA has historically demonstrated remarkable success in maintaining program integrity.
 - Evidence shows that the incidence of fraudulent DI benefit payments is less than 1 percent. Measures that target fraud divert attention and resources away from the true needs of DI beneficiaries—such as reducing disability determination backlogs.²

Cuts to Social Security and SSI Benefits

- **Requiring cuts to Social Security as a condition of reallocation between the OASI and DI trust funds.** Carried forward into the 115th Congress from a procedural rule introduced in the 114th Congress (H. Res. 5).³ Such measures add unnecessary procedural obstacles to reallocation between Social Security’s two trust funds.
 - Reallocations between the OASI and DI trust funds have been made regularly and without incidence in the past, to correct previous overbalances and ensure that the combined trust funds are able to provide earned benefits to all beneficiaries.
 - Requiring Social Security cuts as a condition of reallocation ignores the true solvency of the combined trust funds.⁴
- **Unemployment Insurance/Disability Insurance Offsets.** Proposals that would cut or reduce Social Security benefits for Disability Insurance (DI) beneficiaries who are also receiving unemployment benefits
 - Unemployment Insurance (UI) and DI are both earned benefits—DI beneficiaries are legally entitled to the UI benefits that they have earned.
 - Cutting UI benefits for DI beneficiaries would unduly discriminate against workers with disabilities who are attempting to return to the workforce, and would create unnecessary administrative hurdles for the Social Security Administration.⁵
- **“Fleeing felon” provisions.** Last introduced as the “Control Unlawful Fugitive Felons Act of 2015” or CUFF Act (H.R. 2504, S. 1758). These provisions seek to prohibit people who are the subject of an arrest warrant from receiving Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).
 - If enacted, hundreds of people would lose their Social Security or SSI benefits, including many people with intellectual disabilities or mental illness.
 - These proposals do nothing to help law enforcement officials secure the arrests of those with outstanding warrants, and only increase the Social Security Administration’s administrative costs.⁶
- **Eliminating SSI cash benefits for children and replacing them with “services”.** Paul Ryan’s “A Better Way” plan in June 2016 proposed providing “services” to children with disabilities instead of cash benefits.
 - Cash benefits help offset the significant costs faced by families raising a child with disabilities and allows them to meet their basic needs and pay for expenses not otherwise covered, including special therapies, diets, transportation, etc.
 - Replacing cash benefits with services restricts families’ ability to address the specific needs of their disabled children by limiting them only to the specific services allowed by the government.⁷
- **Block granting the SSI program.** Proposals that would convert the SSI program into a block grant to the states.⁸
 - Block granting typically leads to funding for the program falling over time, and would allow states to divert funds intended for the safety net to other unrelated expenses.⁹

¹ Social Security Works, “Social Security’s Services to Americans Are under Threat,” September 2016. <http://www.socialsecurityworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/US.pdf>

² Social Security Administration, “Report to Chairman Johnson,” February 14, 2014. https://www.ssa.gov/legislation/SSA_Report_to_Chairman_Johnson_2_14_2014.pdf

³ Introduced and passed as H. Res. 5. Republican Policy Committee, “H.Res. _____, Adopting Rules for the 115th Congress,” accessed February 1, 2017. <https://policy.house.gov/legislative/bills/hres-adopting-rules-115th-congress>

⁴ Social Security Works, “Media Backgrounder for Release of 2015 Social Security Trustees Report,” July 2015. http://www.socialsecurityworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/2015-TR-backgrounder-FINAL_BV.pdf

⁵ Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities, “Oppose Cuts to Concurrent SSDI and UI Benefits: Proposals Would Hurt SSDI Beneficiaries and Their Families, Discourage Work,” February 4, 2015. <https://www.c-c-d.org/fichiers/CCD-DI-UI-FactSheet-02-04-15.pdf>

⁶ Justice in Aging, “Cuff Act,” July 2015. <http://www.justiceinaging.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/CUFF-ACT.pdf>

⁷ Coalition on Human Needs, “Outcomes: Supplemental Security Income,” October 2016. <http://www.chn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/SSI-Outcomes-2016-Update-final-Oct.pdf>

⁸ Robert Greenstein, “America’s Concern for the Poor Is about To Be Tested,” *The Washington Post*, December 26, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/americas-concern-for-the-poor-is-about-to-be-tested/2016/12/26/1c1c3b2e-c614-11e6-85b5-76616a33048d_story.html?utm_term=.c23985d6de45

⁹ Robert Greenstein, “Ryan and Block-Granting the Safety Net,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, December 3, 2015. <http://www.cbpp.org/blog/ryan-and-block-granting-the-safety-net>