

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4705

October 4, 2010

To: Social Security Works Washington and the Puget Sound Alliance for Retired Americans,

I appreciate this opportunity to share my views about Social Security and the long-term fiscal challenges facing our nation, and I applaud the efforts of *Social Security Works Washington* and the *Puget Sound Alliance for Retired Americans* to protect and strengthen Social Security for current and future generations.

Since its beginning in 1935, Social Security has been a promise to the American people that retired Americans, and their families, would have a dependable source of income in times of need. It is part of my responsibility as a United States Senator to ensure that the U.S. government upholds this promise and pledge to our seniors, and will do everything I can to strengthen and protect the Social Security program.

The importance of the Social Security program to retirees and disabled Americans cannot be overstated. For seventy-five years, Social Security has prevented millions of seniors from falling into poverty, and it has served as a cornerstone of retirement security for American workers. We have a responsibility to ensure that Social Security delivers on its promises to current and future retirees. Changes to the Social Security program – how it is financed, how benefits are calculated, or decisions about retirement age – should be designed to preserve and strengthen the financial integrity of the program, and should not be a part of the deficit reduction decisions.

It is true that our nation faces difficult fiscal challenges that will require serious solutions. However, despite the fact that Social Security is the single largest federal program and annual expenditure in this country, it does not pose an immediate threat to our fiscal stability and it should not be treated this way. Social Security is often discussed in the context of the two other major entitlement programs – Medicare and Medicaid. While the Congressional Budget Office projects that federal spending on health care programs will double over the next 25 years – an increase of 5% of Gross Domestic Product – spending on Social Security is expected to rise much more slowly.

At the same time, Social Security faces its own challenges, and we should focus our energy on putting the program on a solid footing for the long-term. Within the next decade, the Social Security program is projected to begin running annual deficits – receipts from payroll taxes will be less than benefit payments. Within a generation, by 2037, these cumulative deficits will exhaust the Social Security Trust Fund, requiring a 25% overall reduction in scheduled benefits. Although this is not an immediate crisis, it is not a problem that will solve itself.

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The fundamental principles underlying Social Security are sound. Privatization and other radical reforms are unnecessary and unwise, and I will forcefully oppose all attempts to undermine the basic principles upon which Social Security is based. Social Security is a promise to American workers and their dependants, and changing the rules in the middle of the game by eroding benefits or delaying the retirement age undermines that promise.

Thank you again for your efforts and your staunch support of Social Security. I look forward to working with you to further strengthen Social Security, oppose misguided efforts to weaken or privatize it, and to find sensible and balanced strategies to ensure the long-term fiscal stability of the United States.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Maria Cantwell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Maria" being more prominent than the last name "Cantwell".

United States Senator Maria Cantwell