

Medicare and Social Security are critically important to our nation's seniors, and I am committed to defending these programs. Before these programs were created, most American workers lived their last years in desperate poverty. But with the establishment of Social Security in 1935 and Medicare 30 years later, we have been able to improve greatly the health and living conditions of America's seniors. These programs represent a commitment made by each generation to the one that preceded it that their last years would be a time of dignity and security, not of abject poverty.

### **Medicare:**

Medicare provides a vital foundation for the health and wellness of Americans who are 65 or older or have significant disabilities. The program currently covers a portion of health care costs for more than 47 million individuals throughout the United States. While Medicare is critical in helping older people and people with disabilities pay for necessary services, beneficiaries are often required to share in those costs. In recent years several factors, including an economic downturn and policies by lawmakers, have caused the costs of services and care to shift even further to the beneficiary. Many deficit reduction proposals include changes to Medicare cost-sharing. Increases in cost-sharing and out-of-pocket spending place a heavy burden on beneficiaries and have great implications for their health and daily living.

Medicare faces substantial challenges as the overall cost of health care continues to rise and as the population gets older. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act started to address these changes through payment and delivery system reforms and through an increased focus on eliminating waste, fraud and abuse. However, proposals to further shift the burden of costs for health care to beneficiaries who are already reeling from the economic downturn and other rising costs are short-sighted, risk the health and wellness of Medicare beneficiaries and place a further financial burden on them and their families. Strengthening the traditional Medicare program through other cost-saving approaches, while avoiding further cost-shifting to beneficiaries is key to ensuring that Medicare remains accessible and reliable for future generations. I will oppose efforts to turn Medicare into a voucher program.

### **Social Security:**

Social Security provides income protection to Americans of all ages, shielding most of them

from living below the poverty line while providing an opportunity to preserve wealth and maintain a strong middle class. Social Security is also the mainstay of economic security for older Americans. Two in three seniors who receive benefits get more than half their total income from Social Security. Though never intended to be the sole source of retirement income, Social Security provides more than 90 percent of income to three out of 10 retired elders. But Social Security is more than a retirement program; it is also a family protection plan. About 3.3 million children receive benefits because one or both of their parents are disabled, deceased or retired. These monthly benefits help stabilize families across the nation and across generations.

The current economic downturn created a fiscal predicament. While Social Security played no role in creating the nation's debt, this national promise to America's workers is being marketed as a remedy to the nation's economic ills. Changes to Social Security should do no harm to those for whom it provides a financial lifeline, which is its original intent, as income insurance for all American workers and families, should be maintained.

As we tackle the serious challenge of reducing the national debt, we must remember the real, day-to-day struggles of our nation's workers, families and elders. Responsible decision-making must strike a balance that safeguards and strengthens Social Security while at the same time ensuring long-term stability.

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