



Senior Report 2012

SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS

Dear Vermont Senior,

Each and every day my office hears from seniors just like you about the high cost of oil and gas, food, medicine, and other basic necessities of life. Meanwhile, many wonder why some in Congress want to cut Social Security and end Medicare as we know it. Let me take this opportunity to briefly discuss with you some of the major issues being debated in Washington and what I am doing to protect the interests of senior citizens in Vermont and across the country.

The United States has a \$15 trillion national debt and a \$1.2 trillion deficit. This deficit was significantly caused by two wars (Iraq and Afghanistan) that President Bush and Congress “forgot” to pay for, huge tax breaks for the rich, and the loss of the federal revenue as the result of a recession caused by greed, recklessness and illegal behavior of Wall Street bankers.

Deficit reduction is a very important issue, but it must be dealt with fairly. I strongly disagree with some of my colleagues who want to balance the budget by cutting Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and other programs that are of enormous importance to seniors and the working families of our country.

At a time when the wealthiest people in America are doing extremely well, and their tax rates are the lowest in decades, they must be asked to pay their fair share of taxes. At a time when many major corporations are posting huge profits, some of the biggest businesses in the world should not be allowed to take advantage of tax loopholes that let them avoid paying any U.S. taxes at all. In other words, there are ways of successfully addressing the deficit crisis without attacking some of the most vulnerable members of our society.

Seniors helped build our country and made it the strongest and wealthiest nation in the world. At the same time, you paid taxes to provide for your retirement through Social Security and medical care through Medicare. As Chairman of the Defending Social Security Caucus, I will do everything in my power to make sure that the promises made to seniors will be kept.

I also believe strongly that no senior in this country should go hungry. At a time when poverty among seniors is increasing, we must do all that we can to protect and expand the Meals on Wheels program for seniors as well as other nutrition programs. Those are issues I am working on as we reauthorize the Older Americans Act.

Let me conclude by reminding Vermont seniors that my office is here to help. If you are running into problems with Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, prescription drugs, veteran issues, nutrition services or other federal programs, please do not hesitate to call us at 1 (800)-339-9834. Also, for up-to-date information about what my office is doing, please visit my Website at www.sanders.senate.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bernie".

Bernie Sanders
United States Senator

sanders.senate.gov

PREPARED, PUBLISHED AND MAILED AT TAXPAYER EXPENSE

Fighting for Senior Health Care

The simple reality is that as we get older, we are often in need of more health care services and prescription drugs. While our income opportunities go down, the amount of money we must spend on health care goes up. For that reason, Senator Sanders is vehemently opposed to legislation proposed by House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-WI), which passed the House of Representatives and is supported by Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell.

The Ryan proposal would, within 10 years, end Medicare as we know it. His plan would convert Medicare into a program whereby seniors would be given an \$8,000 voucher with which they could buy an insurance plan with a private insurance company. Think about it. What type of private insurance program could you purchase for \$8,000 that would be suitable for a low or moderate income senior struggling with serious health problems? Studies show that the result



Speaking before a crowd of hundreds on the Capitol grounds, Senator Sanders stresses the importance of preserving Medicaid.

would be either totally inadequate health coverage for seniors or a doubling of their out-of-pocket costs. Further, in terms of affordable prescription drugs, the House plan would immediately do away with our efforts of last year to fill the “donut hole” under the Part D prescription drug program. This would mean higher drug prices for thousands of Vermont seniors.

Many Vermont seniors are veterans, and we thank them very much for their service to our country. In terms of improving veterans’ health care I am happy to inform you that we are making some good progress. During the last several years we have opened two new Vermont veterans’ health care clinics, one in Brattleboro and one in Newport, so that our veterans can receive their

primary health care locally rather than having to drive long distances to White River Junction. We are also in the process of expanding the existing veterans’ facilities in Rutland and Colchester.

Protecting Social Security

Unfortunately, we too often take Social Security for granted. We forget that Social Security is one of the most successful social programs in the history of our country – protecting the needs of more than 50 million Americans and over 114,000 in Vermont.

Before Social Security was established in 1935, some 50 percent of the seniors in our country lived in poverty. Today, that number has been reduced to 10 percent. Social Security also provides significant help to the disabled, widows, and orphans.

Importantly, in good times and bad, Social Security has paid out every nickel it owed to every eligible American. As corporations over the last 30 years destroyed the retirement dreams of millions of older workers by eliminating defined-benefit pension plans, Social Security was there paying full benefits. When Wall Street’s greed and recklessness caused working people to lose billions in retirement savings, Social Security was there paying full benefits.

Yet despite its success, Social Security faces an unprecedented attack from Wall Street and some

Members of Congress who want to reduce benefits by privatizing this invaluable program that is working.

As Chairman of the Defending Social Security Caucus in the United States Senate, Bernie has been a leader in opposing efforts to cut Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. He has often pointed out that Social Security has not contributed one nickel to the deficit because it is independently funded by the payroll tax – not the general treasury. Senator Sanders has also noted that Social Security has a \$2.5 trillion surplus and can pay out every benefit owed to every eligible American for the next 25 years.

In order to make sure that Social Security will be strong and viable for the next 75 years, Bernie has introduced legislation that would lift the cap on Social Security taxable income. That cap is currently at \$110,000. “If the cap was lifted and the wealthiest people in this country paid Social Security taxes on all of their income above \$250,000, enough revenue would be generated to pay out all benefits to all Social Security recipients for the next 75 years. And that’s what we have to do,” said Bernie.

Senior Centers

Senator Bernie Sanders has a strong commitment to senior centers. He knows that these gathering places help seniors fight the isolation that can come with growing older, provide healthy meals, and can be extremely helpful to seniors as they seek services and information to assist them in aging well.

In his five years in the Senate, Bernie has brought more than \$1.4 million into Vermont to improve and upgrade senior centers, over 60 of them, around the state. Another \$300,000 went to providing better delivery capacities for senior meals and senior transportation.



No Senior Should Go Hungry

It is a troubling fact that hunger rates for lower-income seniors have more than doubled in recent years. That is why the Senate Subcommittee on Primary Health Care and Aging, chaired by Senator Sanders, held a hearing this March to discuss this growing crisis.

Bernie was motivated to hold this hearing because a recent report indicated that there are now more than five million seniors in our country facing the threat of hunger and almost one million who go hungry because they cannot afford to buy food. Bernie also learned that some of the most important federal nutrition programs designed to deal with senior nutrition simply do not have the funds needed to address this tragedy.

At the hearing a report was issued, *“Senior Hunger: The Human Toll and Budget Consequences,”* that stressed the ethical and economic reasons for assuring that every senior in America gets adequate nutrition. This is not only the right thing to do from a moral perspective, it also saves money by avoiding costly hospitalizations that all too often result from poor nutrition.

Ken Gordon of the Northeastern Vermont Area Agency on Aging testified about nutrition programs such as Meals on Wheels and the Congregate Meals Program. Ken said, “The seniors who are served by this program have worked hard throughout their lives. They’ve paid taxes. They’ve responded to

the call for military service. They’ve volunteered in their communities. And they’ve made possible the quality of life we all enjoy today. And now at the end of their lives they are struggling to make ends meet.”

Both Meals on Wheels and Congregate Meal Programs were established by the Older Americans Act. The Senate

Subcommittee on Aging is in the midst of updating and improving that law. As Chairman, Senator Sanders is writing a bill that will increase funding for both of these important nutrition programs as well as tackle other critical senior needs. Bernie wants to make it easier for seniors to remain independent in their homes and communities. If you are a senior who wants more information on free or low-cost meals, please call my office toll free at 1(800) 339-9834.



Senator Sanders holds a press conference in his Burlington office on the Older Americans Act.

Need help on how to get in touch with senior advocates? Contact the Area Agency on Aging in your part of the state. To find any of the Agencies on Aging, please call my office toll-free at 1 (800) 339-9834 and we can give you the number to the Vermont Senior HelpLine and that number will automatically connect you with your area agency.

Area Agencies on Aging

These agencies coordinate and support a wide range of home and community-based services, including information and referral, home-delivered and congregate meals, transportation, employment services, senior centers, adult day care and a long-term care ombudsman program. They also provide assistance for adults in need of protection or supportive services.

Central Vermont Council on Aging

Lamoille, Orange, and Washington Counties

Champlain Valley Agency on Aging

Addison, Chittenden, Franklin, and Grand Isle Counties

Area Agency on Aging for Northeastern Vermont

Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans Counties

Council on Aging for SE Vermont

Windham and Windsor Counties
Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging



Bernie will send you an email update providing you with a fresh perspective on events as only he can. Go to sanders.senate.gov to sign up.