

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1502

April 20, 2005

COMMITTEES:  
AGRICULTURE  
APPROPRIATIONS  
HEALTH, EDUCATION,  
LABOR, AND PENSIONS  
SMALL BUSINESS

President George W. Bush  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20502

Dear President Bush:

We appreciate the response we received from Social Security Commissioner Jo Anne Barnhart to our letter regarding Social Security benefits for people with disabilities. In that letter, we expressed concern about the negative impact that proposals to change Social Security could have on the millions of persons for whom the Social Security system, including disability and survivor benefits, are a critical lifeline.

In her response, Commissioner Barnhart reiterated your commitment to preserving disability and survivors benefits, stating that you have no plans to cut benefits for people currently collecting disability and survivor payments. These reassurances are very encouraging.

The letter, however, appears to leave open the possibility that you would support a reduction in disability and survivor payments for people who may become eligible in the future. As you know, three in ten currently healthy twenty-year-olds will become disabled at some point in their lives and, as a result, will require financial assistance to survive. The majority of these workers will not have worked long enough to have accumulated enough money in private accounts to meet even their most basic needs.

In a recent interview with *The New York Times*, Allan B. Hubbard, Chairman of the National Economic Council, appeared to indicate more strongly than Commissioner Barnhart that current and future disabled workers would have no reduction in benefits under your Social Security proposal, even if retirement benefits were cut. Specifically, Mr. Hubbard stated "The President doesn't plan to touch the disability program."

If true, this statement would help assure the American public, including young workers, that the Social Security safety net will remain intact to assist those who become disabled before they retire. We are writing to encourage you to make clear that Mr. Hubbard is correct in his statement that your Administration will not in fact seek to alter the disability payment system, and that workers who become disabled in the future, and families eligible for survivor benefits, will be entitled to the same reliable benefits that current beneficiaries receive.

As Commissioner Barnhart stated in her recent response, the needs of persons with disabilities deserve special attention. Many recipients of disability benefits are barely able to meet basic needs month to month and could not make ends meet if their checks

were reduced even by a very modest amount. As we continue to address this complex and important issue, we hope that we have your agreement that no plan is acceptable if it cannot guarantee continued support for the most vulnerable in our society – now and in the future. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Tom Hark

Max Baucus

Frank R. Lautenberg

Tom F. Kelly

Mark Dayton

Ken Salazar

Pat Kennedy

Charles Schumer

Blanche L. Lincoln

Maryland

Patty Murray

Maria Cantwell

Paul Sarbanes

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Bonnie Boyer